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MICHELLE SNADDON

Always up for a challenge when searching for the ultimate hideaway, travel writer Michelle revealed herself as a supersleuth when she headed off in search of Mozambique's most beautiful beach villas. She spent days driving palm-lined sandy tracks with local insiders who shared their favourite spots. Six flights and a dhow ride later, Michelle came back with a choice of idyllic locations perfect for romantic honeymoons or big family get-togethers. This was her third visit to Mozambique's balmy shores.



GEMMA CATLIN

Gemma is a freelance photojournalist, travel writer and producer. Most recently she has been involved with filming *Out on a Limb*, which follows double-amputee Bushy McKelvey on his mission to help struggling NPOs around southern Africa. To support her philanthropic work, she runs Gertie Creative Solutions with her life – and work – partner Aaron Gekoski. The company specialises in marketing, social media and photography. To learn more about Gemma and view her portfolio, head to www.gemmacatlin.com.



MIMI MURPHY

Mimi, a native New Yorker, has lived in 'Il Bel Paese' for decades, first covering Italy as the correspondent for *LIFE Magazine* and, more recently, as a freelance writer and producer. She has written for *Time*, *National Geographic Traveler*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, *Town & Country*, *Gourmet*, *Departures* and *Travel + Leisure*, and has done production for National Geographic TV, Discovery Channel and ABC News.

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Finding the perfect beach holiday is right up there on my dream travel list,

particularly one that gives you an inside track to local culture. I've just returned from 10 days in Mauritius, having holidayed at the villa we featured three years ago on the cover of our second issue! Lilot, a house on its own islet in the northeast of the island, is every bit as beautiful in reality as I remembered it. My only complaint is that it took 13 issues before I returned there with my family!

My most rewarding travel experiences often take me by surprise. Our recent family holiday is a case in point. Staying in a villa was both authentic and out of the ordinary, as we got to live like locals (buying food from the market and fishermen who ply their trade daily at your door) as well as cultivate a wonderful set of holiday rituals that remain with me to this day: sunrise and sunset, high tide and low tide, snorkelling, beach walks, long lazy lunches in our cossies, the comfort of afternoon naps and, most importantly, some quality parenting.

With this in mind, we sent a *National Geographic Traveller* team off to Mozambique with a mission to find the top 10 villas that offer the authentic, home-from-home holiday I speak of. They came back with not 10 but 12 incredible villas that cater to every taste, need and budget. Find your dream holiday villa on [page 22](#).

Kemyn

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*A journey is
like marriage.
The certain
way to be
wrong is to
think you
control it'*

— JOHN STEINBECK

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COVER Praia da Rocha, Mozambique
PHOTOGRAPH Adriaan Louw

PHOTOGRAPHS JOHN KERNICK, ELSA YOUNG, MASSIMO BASSANO

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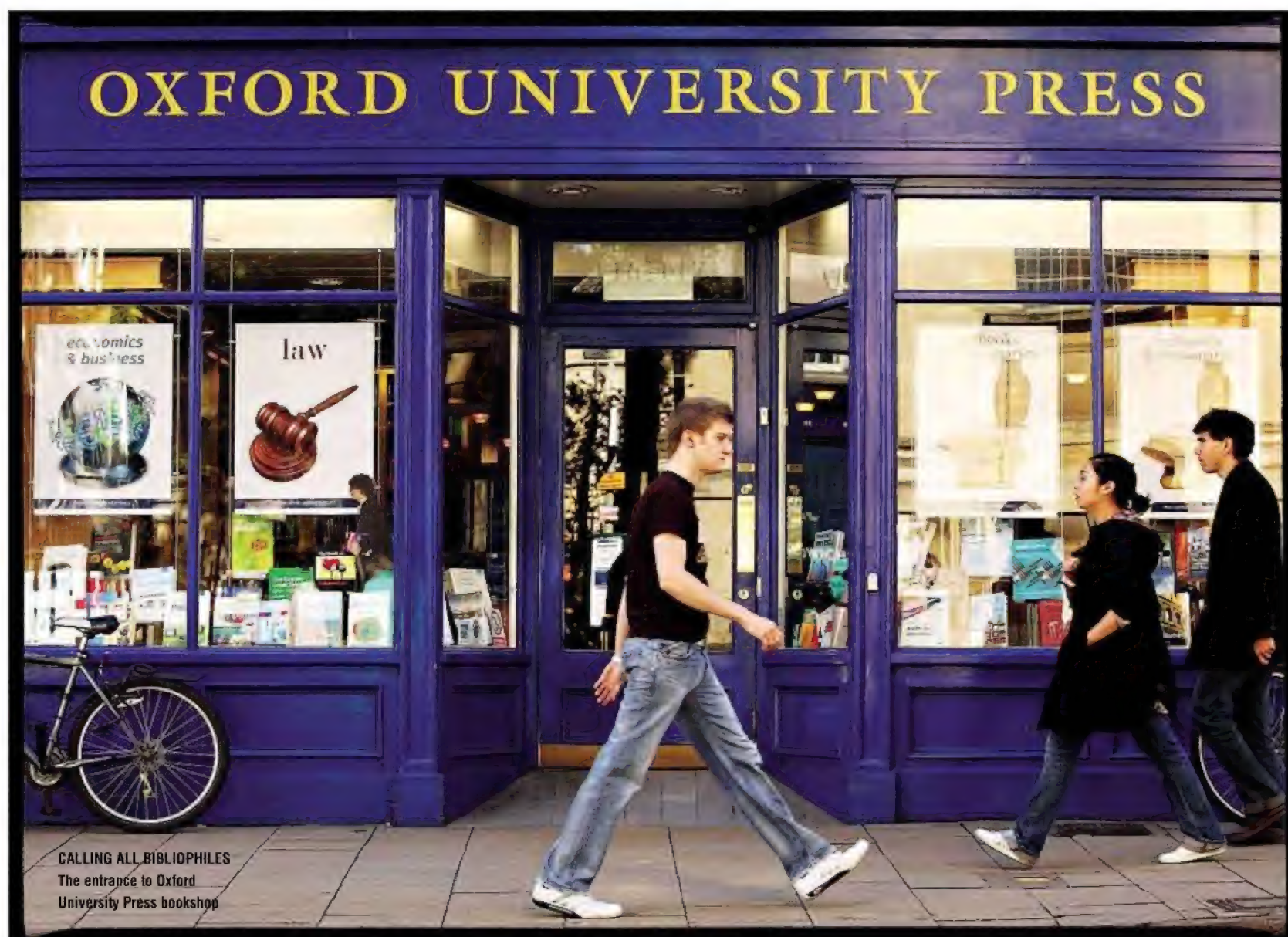
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CALLING ALL BIBLIOPHILES
The entrance to Oxford
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PHOTOGRAPH OLI SCARFF/GETTY IMAGES (PAGE 11); JAMES GARAGHTY (PAGE 12-13, BOTTOM); NELSON VAZQUEZ (PAGE 13, TOP)

THE URBAN READER

LITERARY TRADITIONS UNDERPIN AND ILLUMINATE THESE CITIES

WORDS SHANNON MCKENNA SCHMIDT

'BOOKS ARE THE TREASURED WEALTH OF THE WORLD,' wrote Henry David Thoreau. They educate, enlighten, stoke the imagination. Whether poetry, prose or political treatise, the written word often proves an intrinsic part of a place's culture and history. To fully appreciate the character of a city, travellers should look to its literature. The creative milieus of Paris, London, Edinburgh, New York and Dublin (UNESCO's most recent City of Literature) have long beckoned well-read wanderers. But they aren't the only locales with rich literary legacies. The following four cities offer plenty for book lovers to discover.

OXFORD, ENGLAND

This medieval city boasts the oldest university in the English-speaking world with the largest literature programme in the UK, but its literary leanings extend beyond the historic campus. It has appeared in everything from Romantic poet Matthew Arnold's verse ('that sweet city with her dreaming spires') to Colin Dexter's books featuring Inspector Morse, one of Britain's most popular contemporary sleuths. You can visit the inspector's haunts – including favourite watering holes such as the bar at the **Randolph Hotel** – on one of the literary-themed tours offered by the Oxford Tourist Information Centre.

Books and brews proved an appealing pairing for noted Oxford University lecturers JRR Tolkien and CS Lewis. You may tap into their creative spirit at two vintage pubs where they met for discussions with their playfully named literary group, the Inklings: **The Eagle and Child** (known affectionately by locals as The Bird and Baby) and the **Lamb & Flag**.

Wordsmiths should delve into the museum at **Oxford University Press** to learn about the creation of legendary volumes like the *Oxford English Dictionary* and *Alice in Wonderland*. Allow plenty of time to browse at **Blackwell Bookshop** on Broad Street, an Oxford fixture since 1879, where the over 900m² Norrington Room alone houses more than 160 000 books on almost five kilometres of shelving.

WASHINGTON DC, USA

Founding Father Thomas Jefferson would surely delight in the capital city's bookish side. Some of the original 6 487 tomes he sold to the **Library of Congress** – the world's largest library – are on display in the library's Capitol Hill buildings, along with such treasures as a rare *Gutenberg Bible* and a draft of the Declaration of Independence. A free guided tour reveals the institution's literary and architectural significance. From the Great Hall of the Jefferson Building, ascend the staircase to the Visitors' Gallery to view the opulent Main Reading Room, with its stained glass, marble and murals. You can even join the erudite researchers below by applying for an ID card.

A free audio walking tour by the **Poetry Foundation** visits sites associated with the bards who lived and wrote in the city, including Walt Whitman and Sarah Browning. Another was Harlem Renaissance member Langston Hughes, whose dual professions inspired the moniker of **Busboys and Poets**, a café, bookstore and gathering place for today's literati (the flagship is at

READ THIS

OXFORD: JAN MORRIS SHOWS SIGNATURE BREADTH OF KNOWLEDGE AND ATTENTION TO DETAIL IN *OXFORD*. WASHINGTON DC: CONTEMPORARY MYSTERY NOVELIST GEORGE PELECANOS ILLUMINATES THE SHADOWS AND CAPTURES THE GRIT OF THE CAPITAL IN *SOUL CIRCUS*.

14th and V Streets, NW). The indie bookstore **Politics and Prose** (in the Chevy Chase neighbourhood) invites patrons to attend regularly held author events or sit in on book group discussions (just read the featured selection and show up). The store has hosted everyone from lesser-known novelists to former presidents, Pulitzer Prize winners and political pundits. **Kramerbooks** and the adjoining **Afterwords Café** in the Dupont Circle neighbourhood are open 24 hours on Fridays and Saturdays. Pick up some bedtime reading here, such as one of David Baldacci's DC-set thrillers.

STOCKHOLM, Sweden

Inventor Albert Nobel put Stockholm on the international literary map a century ago with the Nobel Prizes, which laud the achievements of writers along with those of scientists and peace activists. From American author Toni Morrison to Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa, the Swedish capital plays host to the literary world's heavyweights.

John Steinbeck and other laureates slumbered in splendour at the **Grand Hôtel**; you can too. Stop in **City Hall** to see the site of the annual December banquet. While here, sample the cuisine served at the most recent awards dinner at the restaurant **Stadshuskällaren**. Or head to **Den Gyldene Freden** restaurant, in history-steeped Gamla Stan (Old Town). The Swedish Academy, which selects recipients of the Nobel Prize in Literature, has hosted a standing Thursday dinner here for more than a century. While in Gamla Stan, pop by the **Nobel Museum**.

SHERLOCK IN LONDON

You be the detective. Track the original gumshoe on foot. To follow in the footsteps of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's detective in London, start at the **Sherlock Holmes Museum** at 221b Baker Street, where his deerstalker cap and other prized possessions are on display. Ramble through the city with 'In the Footsteps of Sherlock Holmes', a weekly tour by **London Walks**, then tuck into traditional English fare at **Simpson's-in-the-Strand**. Opened in 1828, this is where Holmes and sidekick Dr Watson dined after cracking cases. Cap off the evening at the **Museum Tavern**, across the street from the British Museum. Doyle was a regular at the bar and likely used it as the model for the Alpha Inn in *The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle*. Want to make like Holmes? Just order a couple of pints.

STANDOUT

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For a not-so-highbrow thrill, take the guided Millennium Tour offered by the **Stockholm City Museum** to view sites depicted in Stieg Larsson's best-selling novel *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* and its two sequels. Do-it-yourselfers can buy a map of the hot spots. Before dragon-tattooed computer hacker Lisbeth Salander turned up, spirited children's book character Pippi Longstocking was Sweden's most famous fictional lass. A statue in **Tegnérunden Park** honours her creator, Astrid Lindgren.

SANTIAGO, Chile

'It is my love affair with Santiago,' Pablo Neruda said of his volume *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*. Nearly 40 years after his death, the 'people's poet' and diplomat remains a much revered figure in Chile and beyond, particularly for his romantic verse. Pay a call to **La Chascona**, his final Santiago residence, where he rendezvoused with his mistress (and, eventually, third wife). Both the woman and the house inspired his poetry. Become familiar with Neruda's hilltop Bellavista neighbourhood during a bike outing with **La Bicicleta Verde**.

The high cost of new books in Chile has created a robust market for second-hand publications. Peruse the offerings at the weekend market on Lastarria Street near the **Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes**, or visit the numerous merchants in the small shop near the intersection of Miguel Claro Street and Providencia Avenue. Java-seeking bibliophiles should head to **Café Literario**, a city library with several branches, including one in Balmaceda Park with 30 000 books.

Known to some as 'a land of poets', Chile pays homage to another bard, Nobel Prize-winning Gabriela Mistral, with an elaborate mural in Santiago's **Cerro Santa Lucia Park** and her portrait on the 5 000-peso note.



READ THIS

STOCKHOLM: *CITY OF MY DREAMS* IS THE FIRST IN A FIVE-PART SERIES BY PER ANDERS FOGELSTROM. **SANTIAGO:** ISABEL ALLENDE'S *INÉS OF MY SOUL* RECOUNTS THE LIFE OF THE SPANISH CONQUISTADORA INÉS SUÁREZ, WHO CO-FOUNDED THE CHILEAN CAPITAL.



SUPERCHARGED SWISS WHEELS

Apply Swiss ingenuity and an active love of the outdoors to a landscape profuse with mountains, and you get the rechargeable Swiss electric bike. These cycles have been growing in popularity throughout Europe (Britain's Lake District, Versailles and Amsterdam all have rental schemes), but leave it to the Swiss to fine-tune them and to create what may be the most extensive support network of marked trails anywhere in the world. Ubiquitous battery-charging stations along the trails make long trips feasible (www.veloland.ch for route and battery swap-point maps), as do groups such as Swiss Trails (www.swisstrails.ch), which can provide daily luggage transport. With more than 400 rental stations across Switzerland, the newest versions of e-bikes boost pedal stroke up to 150 percent with the push of a button. They guarantee that even less fit riders can attack harrowing inclines with the grace of Lance Armstrong. But athletes, too, sing their wheelie praises. 'I felt a little bit as if I was cheating, but my Swiss Flyer was more like insurance,' says student Lizzy Williams, who rode from Basel through the hair-raising St Gotthard Pass to Lugano. (Go to www.rentabike.ch for e-bike rentals.) – *Becca Hensley*

To take e-bike day tours in Cape Town or rent e-bikes by the hour or for a day, contact Bike & Saddle; www.bikeandsaddle.com

BRIDGING THE GAP
An e-biker crosses
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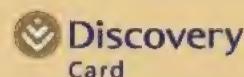
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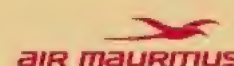
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NAMIBIA'S SEAL CULL

The price of sporting a fur coat

The fate of Namibia's Cape fur seals is currently one of the most contentious wildlife issues on Earth. This year from July to November, up to 85 000 pups and 6 000 bulls will be culled along the Skeleton Coast. The pups, barely seven months old, are beaten over the head with a club before being stabbed in the heart and left to 'bleed out'. Their pelts are turned into fashion accessories such as fur coats, which sell for up to R250 000 each. The bulls' penises, used to create an aphrodisiac, command up to R4 200 each on the Asian market.

While seal numbers have fallen here, the cull has become the second-largest in the world, after Canada's. Ninety percent of seal pelts go through one man: Hatem Yavuz. Yavuz is a Turkish-born businessman currently living in Australia. Paying R60 per pelt, he has the contract to buy skins resulting from the seal slaughter until 2019. (See Australia's Seven News interview with Yavuz at www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nWfQowjQg.)

Seal Alert SA is leading the fight against the cull. 'The Namibian government is violating two different constitutional acts. Seal clubbing is an unlawful and unregulated industry,' says its founder Francois Hugo. To conservationists such as Hugo and other animal welfare organisations, clubbing seals to death is an act of barbarism, a slaughter of unthinkable proportions.

Despite international boycotts of Namibian products, the government is standing firm: the annual harvest preserves dwindling fish stocks and creates employment. Harvest, slaughter or cull – whatever your stance, it seems likely that this debate will rage on a little longer.

SURF'S UP

RIGHT Richard Schmidt Surf School guarantees novices 'uprightness on the first go-out' ABOVE The Cape fur seal is culled annually in massive numbers in Namibia

BOARD OF EDUCATION

Where anyone can learn how to ride the waves

Upon observing wave-riding Hawaiians in 1907, Jack London rhapsodised that surfing was 'a royal sport for the natural kings of the earth'. These days, teens to CEOs connect with the elemental thrill of the surf and devotees of the sport have set up surf schools and camps around the globe for would-be beach royalty.

Kauai, Hawaii Startling beauty, a low-key vibe and brawny offshore waves have long delighted serious surfers at Hanalei Bay (Laird Hamilton calls it his home break). But the bay's crescent also welcomes newbies with clean swells, a sandy bottom and warm water; nearby, humpback whales can sometimes be seen spouting. Surf n Sol's multiday programmes include private or small-group lessons, beachside digs, yoga and massages. www.surfnsol.com

Cape Town, Western Cape Muizenberg's gently sloping white beach and regular waves make it possible to learn to surf quickly and safely. Here you'll find Gary's Surf School, the oldest in the country. Rent boards and wetsuits for R100 each per day, and if Gary Kleynhans can't get you up and riding, you don't pay for the two-hour lesson (R450). www.garysurf.com

Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica Kilometre-long beaches draw tourists to Playa Tamarindo, but thick jungle and unpaved roads keep most travellers from venturing south of the town.

Surf Diva's resort, set near a traditional Tico village, features a stretch of sand so secluded its location is kept secret from enrollees before they arrive. The camp is for women only; boards are scaled for their narrower shoulders and shorter reach. www.surfdivacostarica.com

Montauk, New York The shore break at Long Island's Ditch Plains can be challenging – it's choppy, cold and edges a mostly rocky beach. But warm, enthusiastic Corey's Wave instructors, including many who've been surfing here their entire lives, reveal how to navigate the rocks and where to find beer and burgers onshore. www.coreyswave.com

Santa Cruz, California For those who crave hands-on help, Richard Schmidt Surf School delivers. The one-time pro surfer paddles alongside beginners, lifting them into the pop-up and adjusting their stance for smooth, long rides. At Cowell's Point break, where Schmidt runs classes and camps, a single wave can roll for 400 metres. www.richardschmidt.com

Byron Bay, Australia Wave chasers mingle with New Age types at beaches along the coast's easterly apex. The surf haven is also the home of 1965 US surfing champion Rusty Miller; now nearly 70, he teaches private lessons at Byron's gentlest shore breaks. For Miller, surfing is a near-spiritual pursuit; he encourages ocean respect and humility. www.rustymillersurf.com

Durban, KwaZulu-Natal Durban's excellent breaks and warm subtropical waters were the birthplace of surfing in South Africa. Roxy Learn2Surf operates from the Marine Surf Lifesaving Club on Addington Beach, where golden sand and warm Indian Ocean waters (plus the reassuring presence of shark nets) add up to learner-surfer paradise. Private lessons are R150 an hour or R300 for four a month, including board and wetsuit. www.roxy.co.za

– Sarah Gold



RUNES OF THE DUNES
Millions of years in the making, the Namib has some of the world's highest dunes

UNDER NAMIBIA'S DESERT SUN

Like a question mark in the dust, the world's oldest desert asks more than it reveals. Abandon pride, and perhaps shoes, and you may get a few answers. The first lesson Namibia's arid enigma teaches – by way of roiling, broiling, immense oceans of sand – is that you're small. Really small. To soar by plane over the cracked clay pan of Sossusvlei is to embrace both the enormity of southern Africa's sand sea and the certainty that this 55-million-year-old ecosystem will guard its secrets for ages to come. On foot, the scale and silence of this sandscape seem like a sun-stoked fever dream. Studded with red dunes, speckled by skeletal trees, watered by fog rolling off the Atlantic Ocean and populated by desert creatures whose adaptations would delight Darwin, Namib-Naukluft National Park is a cache of rippled contours. How does a traveller take in this desert? Some drive a day from the capital of Windhoek, check into an ecolodge in Sesriem, open a Tafel Lager and catch sunset over the Tsauchab River. Others fly to Kulala Wilderness Camp and count the stars in transcendent isolation. – *George W Stone*

Enjoy the majestic sight of dawn breaking over the Sossusvlei dunes from the air: spend three nights at &Beyond Sossusvlei Desert Lodge and enjoy a complimentary hot air balloon safari over the desert. To book, please contact safaris@andbeyond.com

BOXING CLEVER

Ever had to curl up under your coat on an airport floor or fold yourself up between two strangers on a terminal bench while you wait for a connection?

Now there's a more humane option for the weary traveller trying to catch some shut-eye while waiting for the red-eye. Thanks to a new breed of micro-sleep spaces popping up in airports around the world, you can seal yourself off for a 30-minute power nap or a good night's sleep without having to leave for a hotel. Rooms range from a capsule the size of crawl space to an en-suite bathroom option.



Atlanta **HARTSFIELD-JACKSON AIRPORT**

Stay at? Minute Suites.

Where? Five suites on Concourse B at Gate B15.

What? The soundproofed room comes with a sofa bed and HDTV.

How much? A minimum one-hour stay will set you back about R246. Every 15 minutes thereafter costs R57. The flat overnight rate is R983; www.minutesuites.com



Beijing **BEIJING CAPITAL INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT**

Stay at? The Hourly Lounge.

Where? West of the public space in the Arrivals Lounge on the second floor of Terminal 3.

What? Sleep pods that offer single or standard beds with a TV.

How much? A standard room with private bath costs about R385 for up to six hours; www.bcia.com.cn/server/service/lounge



Dubai **DUBAI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT**

Stay at? SnoozeCubes.

Where? Adjacent to Gate 122 in Terminal 1 (open to passengers from terminals 2 and 3 too).

What? Soundproof rooms with a twin bed, TV and WiFi. They're connected to the airport's flight information system so you won't miss your flight.

How much? From R133 per hour; www.snoozecube.com



London **HEATHROW AIRPORT**

Stay at? Yotel Cabin Hotel.

Where? Heathrow Terminal 4, before security.

What? There are 32 sleep cabins in three sizes (from 7 to 10m²). Small units pack in single or double beds, entertainment systems, a work desk and an en-suite bathroom.

How much? About R407 for four hours, or R1 691 overnight; www.yotel.com



Amsterdam **SCHIPHOL AIRPORT**

Stay at? Yotel Cabin Hotel.

Where? The 57 sleep cabins are on the second floor behind Passport Control near Pier D.

What? Rooms have an electric pull-out bed and a monsoon power-shower room. WiFi and hot drinks are free.

How much? Prices from R454 for four hours, or R1 312 overnight; www.yotel.com



Delhi **INDIRA GANDHI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT**

Stay at? Sam's Snooze at My Space.

Where? Opposite Gate 17 in International Departures.

What? Sleeping pods with a work table for your laptop, WiFi and TV.

How much? R83 an hour (R116 for two people sharing); www.newdelhiairport.in



Munich **MUNICH AIRPORT**

Stay at? NapCabs.

Where? The six pods are in Terminal 2 near Gate H32 on Level 5 and near Gate G06 on Level 4.

What? A bed, small workspace, TV and WiFi.

How much? From R100 (daytime) to R157 (at night) per hour, with a minimum charge of R310; www.munich-airport.de



Tokyo **HANEDA AIRPORT**

Stay at? First Cabin.

Where? First floor of Terminal 1.

What? Business and First Class sleep cabins with shower booths, plus communal bathhouse. TV, internet access and self-service laundromat.

How much? From R326 for a minimum two-hour stay, overnight stays from R492; www.first-cabin.jp

CITIES ARE THE KEY

Increasingly, our world turns on 40 mega-regions populated by creative people

RICHARD FLORIDA URBAN THEORIST

*Author, professor and urban theorist Richard Florida is the director of the Martin Prosperity Institute and a business professor at the University of Toronto. He also founded the Creative Class Group, a think-tank based in Washington DC. He taught for 18 years at Carnegie Mellon University and has been a visiting professor at MIT and Harvard. Florida says society's success is inextricably bound to the success of our great cities. And yet the growing concentration of wealth and human capital in urban areas is leading to greater inequality, with a person's prosperity determined increasingly by location. Florida explores social and economic trends in his numerous books, including the seminal *The Rise of the Creative Class*, published in 2002, and *Who's Your City? How the Creative Economy is Making Where to Live the Most Important Decision of Your Life* (2008).*

YOU'VE SAID THE WORLD IS BECOMING 'SPIKIER' BY THE DAY.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

I'm referring to how the world's centres of innovation and economic development are becoming much more concentrated. And as these spiky places – whether Silicon Valley or the Beijing-Shanghai mega-region or the Bangalore-Mumbai corridor in India – become more prosperous, they're becoming more economically and socially distant from the rest of their countries. So the world is getting spikier and also more unequal as a result.

IS THE 21ST CENTURY THE CENTURY OF THE CITY?

No doubt about that. In 2008, the world went urban – with more than half the population now living in urban centres. The world now turns on these great conglomerations of cities we called mega-regions: the Boston-New York-Washington corridor, the areas that stretch from Chicago to Detroit and Cleveland to Pittsburgh, Greater London, Greater Tokyo, the Brussels-Antwerp-Amsterdam corridor, and so on. These 40 mega-regions house less than 20% of the population but produce two-thirds of the Earth's economic output and nine in 10 of our innovations. Cities are the key to all the grand challenges of the century. Economic prosperity comes from density. It comes from close interactions. It comes from people and firms clustering together to spur new innovation and to leverage each other's talents to create new technologies and new ways of doing business that will drive growth and raise living standards.

WHAT ROLE DOES SENSE OF COMMUNITY PLAY?

It's becoming much more important, especially because so many of us live alone or have to move far away from family and childhood friends. That sense of community becomes our anchor. I'm very drawn to places that have this distinctive sense of self, a distinctive soul. One of our biggest challenges is how to remake our suburbs, which tend to be generic. How do we create character? How do we make them more liveable and purposeful?

WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN TO DESTINATIONS WE CHERISH FOR THEIR SENSE OF PLACE?

I think back to my parents' or grandparents' generations. When they travelled to Europe, whether Poland, Paris or London – never mind Asia or Africa – they had a completely different experience from being at home. There were completely different places to stay, different foods, different fashions, not to mention different languages. Now I'm struck by the degree to which our world has become homogenous. Whether we're in France, Egypt, China or Japan, we tend to eat the same foods, wear the same clothes, drive the same cars. But then, simultaneously, people are trying to find what's unique and authentic in the world, and that interest makes those things rise in value. In some ways, capitalism is wrapping its arms around a place's sense of history and authenticity, viewing them as economic assets, a storehouse of value and profits. And yet popularity threatens those assets. Coming to grips with that contradiction is an important challenge, because once that history and authenticity are eradicated, they're impossible to get back.

– Keith Bellows

URBAN FOOD CARTS

Use Twitter to find out exactly where these roving restaurants are right now



In the vanguard: the US scene

LOS ANGELES: **KOGI**

Korean-fusion barbecue has a cult following and a mini-fleet of four trucks to satiate demand for its signature short-rib tacos with sesame-chilli salsa roja and specials like Korean chicken mole and kimchi. @kogibbq

SAN FRANCISCO: **THE CRÈME BRÛLÉE MAN**

Typical of San Francisco's underground street food scene, this single-specialty pushcart is a small-scale affair. Flavours run from classic vanilla bean to lavender, dark chocolate Grand Marnier and s'mores, caramelised before your eyes. @cremebruleecart

SEATTLE: **SKILLET STREET FOOD**

Chef-designed, modern American comfort food is locally sourced and made to order out of this converted Airstream. Seasonal menu items may include grass-fed beef burgers with bacon, jam and rocket, macaroni and cheese with cauliflower, and duck prosciutto and golden beet risotto. @skilletstfood

NEW YORK: **RICKSHAW DUMPLING TRUCK**

'Who's your dumpling?' riddles the slogan emblazoned across the menu, which offers dumpling selections like savoury Peking duck, wild American shrimp, and chicken and Thai basil. Each flavour is matched with a dipping sauce. The roving extension of the Flatiron restaurant also dishes up hot and cold sides like miso soup or chilled edamame, depending on the weather. @rickshawtruck

MEALS ON WHEELS

Limoncello serves gourmet Neapolitan-style cuisine from its retro-cool food truck

WASHINGTON DC: **FOJOL BROS.**

A fake-moustached, beturbaned band of Indian food sellers proffers vegetarian and meat entrées over rice, such as cauliflower and potatoes, pumpkin and chicken curry, plus sweet mango lassipops, served up from a decorated purple truck. @fojolbros – Linda Burbank

Local heroes: SA food trucks

CAPE TOWN: **LIMONCELLO**

Popular Cape Town eatery Limoncello has traded in its brick-and-mortar roots for a retro 1979 Ford motorhome with a fully equipped stainless-steel kitchen. This roving lunch box – the first of a collective of Cape Town Food Trucks planned by Luca Castiglione – serves delicious Neapolitan-inspired fare like calzone and risotto, and seafood fresh from that morning's fish market. Find out whether Luca's at Oudekraal or the Biscuit Mill, in Stellenbosch or the City Bowl, on Facebook or Twitter. www.capetownfoodtrucks.co.za, @CTFoodTrucks

JOBURG: **FULL OF BEANS**

Coffee addicts and pressed-for-time executives looking for upmarket lunch food and gourmet snacks on wheels can trace the daily movements of these retro-chic TriVespa scooters, or tuk-tuks, via live Twitter feed and on Facebook. Full of Beans currently sells Tribeca coffee plus superior wraps, salads, sandwiches and confectioneries in Norwood and Woodmead from 7am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. Nine more mobile eateries are planned, including sushi, dumpling and noodle bars and a frozen yoghurt tuk-tuk. www.fullofbeans.co.za, @fullofbeans_

THERE'S A NEW TRAIL IN TOWN

European greenways mix nature and culture

Threaded through an array of European countries, car-free corridors known as *vias verdes* and *voie vertes* attract cyclists and hikers, reduce pollution and connect communities. Here are five to try.

Ruta del Carrilet, Spain

From Olot in the Garrotxa volcanic area of the Catalan Pyrenees, this greenway meanders mostly downhill through oak forests along the former route of a narrow-gauge railway. Stop in Girona, the capital of the Costa Brava, to explore a well-preserved Jewish quarter, or follow the path to a sandy Med beach in Sant Feliu de Guíxols. Naturbike (www.naturbike.com) offers tours.

Charnay-les-Macon to Givry, France

This 64-km-long route in Burgundy traverses vineyarded hillsides sprinkled with medieval villages. Oenophiles stop at cellars in the Mâconnais and Chalonais regions. Don't miss the 10th-century Benedictine Abbey in Cluny or the Renaissance château in Cormatin. Ludisport (www.ludisport.com) offers bike rental.

Lunga via delle Dolomiti, Italy

This trail through meadows and wooded valleys at the foothills of the Dolomites has something for history buffs and nature lovers. Along the path that wanders from Dobbiaco to Calalzo, communities range from the village of Cibiana with its mural-painted houses to the Olympic city of Cortina d'Ampezzo. FunActive Tours (www.funactive.info) offers bike rental and guided treks.

Klarälvsbanan, Sweden

Meandering through a bucolic landscape from Karlstad to Hagfors, this almost 90-km-long greenway (www.klaralvsbanan.se) parallels the Klarälven River. Lake Syrsjön beckons as an ideal picnic spot. Waterworld (www.waterworldsweden.com) runs tours.

Vulkanradweg, Germany

This trail crosses the fields and forests of the Vogelsberg region, home to an extinct volcano. Wend your way from the town of Schlitz with its fairy-tale castles to Altenstadt, an old Roman garrison. Try the mineral baths in Herbstein, or the lakes in Gedern, Lauterbach. Rad Tours (www.rad-tours.de) offers rentals and tours.

– Jeanine Barone

TOUGH

DOESN'T SLOW DOWN
FOR ROUGH TERRAIN.

SMART

DOESN'T STOP
FOR FUEL.



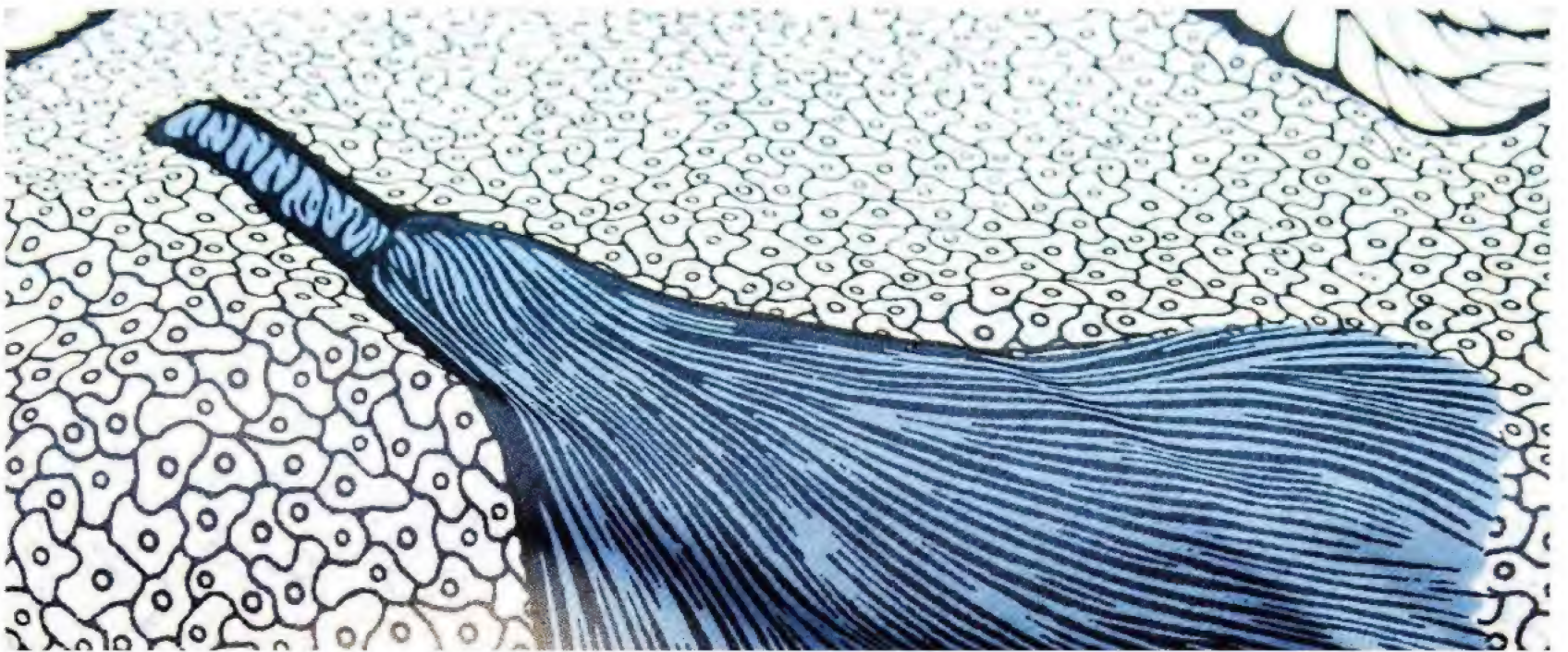
With 400 Nm of torque and 132 kW of power, there aren't many double-cabs that can keep up with an Amarok. Built-in intelligence like ESP and Hill Hold Assist all mean the Amarok stays on track even when the going gets really tough. And with fuel consumption of just 7.9 litres per 100 kms, even those that can keep up will be forced to stop long before an Amarok does.

Not just tough, smart. Amarok.



**Commercial
Vehicles**

Amarok Double Cab available in: 2.0 TSI® 118kW Trendline; 2.0 TDI 90 kW Trendline; 2.0 TDI 90 kW 4Motion® Trendline; 2.0 BiTDI® 132 kW Highline; 2.0 BiTDI® 132 kW 4Motion® Highline. Fuel consumption values are determined using the prescribed methods of measurement (EC Regulation 80/1268/EEC) and apply to the 2.0 BiTDI® 132 kW Highline.



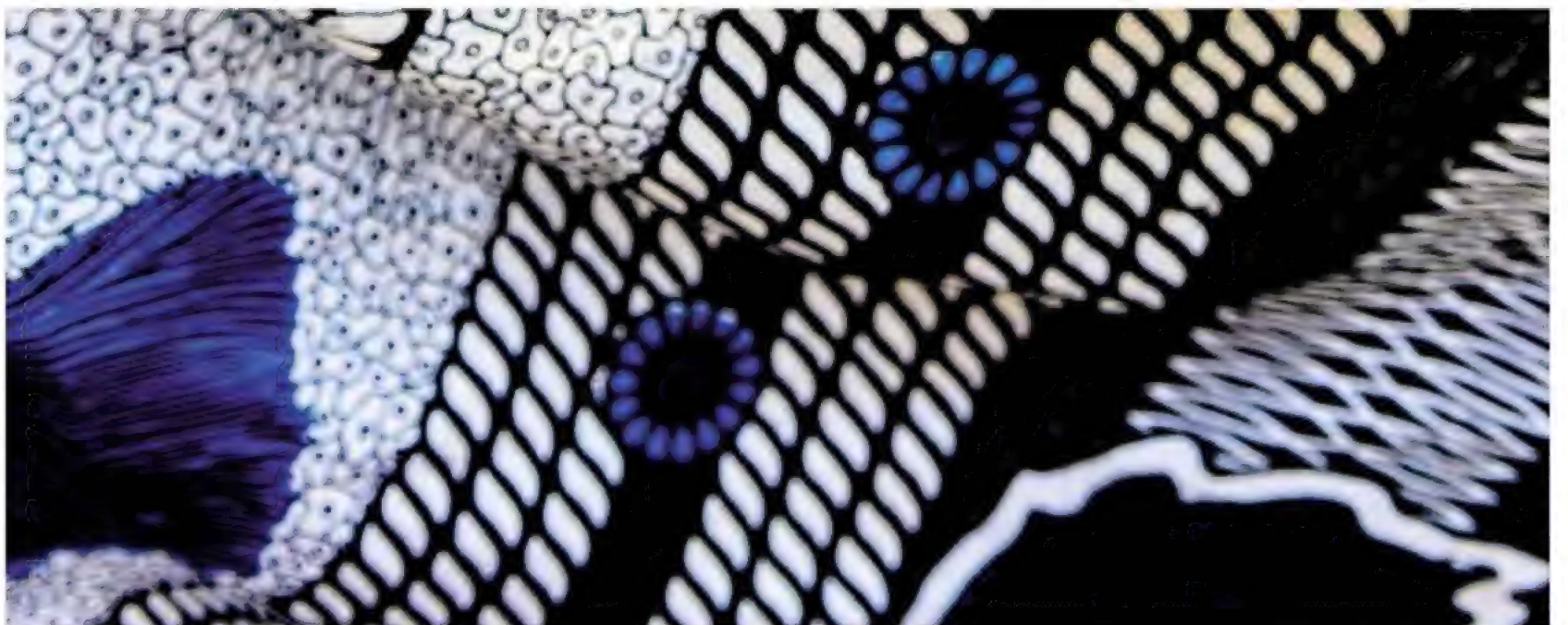
MOZAMBIQUE

beach villa rentals

WHILE MANY BOOK AN EXOTIC ISLAND HOTEL GETAWAY TO MOZAMBIQUE, **MICHELLE SNADDON** SET OUT TO FIND THE MOST IDYLIC CASA BETWEEN VILANCULOS AND PRAIA DA ROCHA NEAR INHAMBANE.

SHE DISCOVERED 12 DREAM BEACH HOUSES THAT PROMISE AN AUTHENTIC HOLIDAY WHERE GLORIOUS DAYS STRETCH INTO BALMY NIGHTS AND TIME IS YOUR OWN

PHOTOGRAPHS ADRIAAN LOUW







Vilanculos *It's no wonder Vilanculos (or Vilankulo) got its sleek new airport before the domestic terminal in Maputo – travellers seeking the azure waters of the Bazaruto Archipelago head straight here, mostly on their way to the pristine islands of Bazaruto and Benguerra, or to take a dhow safari to the smaller gems of Magaruque, Santa Carolina (also known as Paradise Island) and Bangue just off the coast. Landlubbers needn't fear, though, as diving and snorkelling are not the only attractions. And, while many think that a holiday in Mozambique is all about staying on the islands, the mainland has some equally alluring villas to book and enjoy with a couple of friends or with family.*

LAI-D-BACK LUXURY

PREVIOUS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The beaches at Vilanculos are delightfully unspoilt; local fabrics; Vilanculos from the air; go kayaking from Ebony Beach; Bazaruto Views; shell pathways; Ebony Beach's lower villa; fish of the day on Tofo Beach; explore on horseback with Mozambique Horse Safaris

THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT Late-afternoon light splices through the shutters in the living area at Ebony Beach; blooming bougainvillea cascades over the pool area at the upper villa
OPPOSITE Choose to self-cater or book Ebony Beach's cooks, who will look out for the freshest catch of the day from the beachfront garden in front of the lower villa



EBONY BEACH

Ebony Beach has two villas: one right on the beach and one up the slope at the top of the garden. Both have pools and sleep eight each, so they're absolutely ideal for four families. But the secret here is that this is one of the few beach houses with water in front of it all day. Even at low tide, the water at Ebony is nine metres deep, whereas much of Vilanculos has only sand when the tide is out because the shoreline is so shallow. You can cook for yourself or enjoy the company of their cooks, who will prepare seafood for you too. Everything about this spot begs relaxation and it's hard to leave (although Casa Guci next door does unbeatable pizzas), but for those who want to kayak along the shoreline, take a horse safari or snorkel offshore, everything can be organised by manager Len Sanderson. Memories of riotous scarlet bougainvillea, shell-encrusted pathways and shafts of afternoon light through a garden of palms will always come flooding back after a holiday here.

Closest town? Vilanculos; it is 30 to 45 minutes south of the airport.

Sleeps? Eight each (two villas, four bedrooms in each).

Child-friendly? Yes, especially as this is one of the few properties with palm-shaded rolling lawns leading down to the beach. It's fenced at the bottom of the garden, and is right on the beach so you don't need to drive anywhere.

Activities? Dolphin and whale watching, canoeing, sundowner cruises, scuba diving, snorkelling, diving, fishing trips (including professional fly fishing), boat charters.

Negatives? If you want to rent both villas, it'll be a tussle to decide who's going into the one closest to the beach!

Cost? R2 500 for exclusive use of a villa in high season, R3 750 peak season (from about R313 to R469 pppn). If you wish the chef to cook three meals a day for you, it's R425 a person a day for food.

Contact Sofie Sigrist-Geroudis at Travel Xcellence 011 880 8806 or 082 553 9404; sofie@travelxcellence.co.za; www.ebonybeach.co.za

To do... VILANCULOS

Swimming with horses

One of the most moving experiences for any horse lover has to be swimming with the horses of Mozambique Horse Safaris in the warm waters off Vilanculos. Mandy Retzlaff and her husband Pat are well known for their heroic rescue of over 100 horses after the Zimbabwe Land Invasion in 2002 when horses were simply left to starve on farms. By 2006 they had taken 104 horses across the border into Mozambique. Today, the team specialises in horse-riding holidays – from tropical beach outrides to horse-back safaris – along the coastline and on Bengueria Island in the Bazaruto Archipelago. These 'rescue' horses are quite content to share their paradise by plunging into its warm waters with you on their backs, a feeling akin to swimming with dolphins. 'You feel the surge and powerful strength of the horse under you – it's exhilarating, and you bond with the animal,' says Mandy. 'Even for kids, there's no fear because there isn't far to fall.' Book a ride on the Red Dunes on North Beach or through coconut plantations to Enrique's Fishing Village in Vilanculos, where you can drink coconut juice and eat fresh crab or *metapa*, a traditional dish made from cassava leaves, nuts and coconut milk. To book, contact info@mozambiquehorsesafari.com, mozmandy2@gmail.com, +258 293 84247 or +258 84 251 2910; www.mozambiquehorsesafari.com.

Other activities that can be organised by the villas include camel rides, kite surfing, dhow trips, scuba diving and snorkelling, deep-sea fishing, picnics on Pansy Island or visiting Cowry Point to see the shells. Or do a day tour of the town with a guide, and visit Machilla Magic just 25km north of Vilanculos, a community upliftment arts and crafts project.





VILA DO PARAISO

With six thatched villas at this beach resort, it's a good idea to rent a few together with friends so that you can have the place to yourselves. Each one has its own plunge pool on the deck, plus a generous-sized and well-equipped kitchen, although there is a restaurant and bar down at the beach pool, so if you don't feel like cooking you just drift along the path down to the sea. Bedrooms are en suite and the bedding and towels are good quality.

Closest town? Vilanculos; Vila do Paraiso is 10 minutes from the airport.

Sleeps? Each villa sleeps eight in four double rooms.

Child-friendly? Yes, although plunge pools on the decks are unfenced.

Activities? Vila do Paraiso has its own boats so guests can do all water-based activities, plus villa staff can organise horse or dhow safaris.

Negatives? Some of the lounge sofas and chairs are looking tired and need replacing.

Cost? R4 100 to R4 500 per villa per night (about R512 to R562 pppn); up to two extra children are allowed at an additional R150 pppn.

Contact James Halsted 011 706 8167, 083 395 0100, james@viladoparaiso.com or info@viladoparaiso.com; <http://viladoparaiso.com/accommodation.aspx>

EAST AFRICAN IDYLL

THIS PAGE Inspired by Santorini and designed by none other than Martin Rattray from Plettenberg Bay, the domed Bazaruto Views was built entirely by a local team in

Vilanculos over three years

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Reflecting muted shades of the sky and sand, the interiors at Bazaruto Views are calm and uncluttered; Vila do Paraiso is set right on Mahaque Beach just north of Vilanculos; chefs George Nhalingue and Carlton Filisberto Mangué are yet another good reason to stay at Bazaruto Views; Bazaruto Views' roof-top terrace is the place to be come cocktail hour

BAZARUTO VIEWS

Built by hand with over a million bricks made on site and with its own flourishing veggie garden, there's nothing along this coastline quite like this multilevel, Greek-inspired villa. And with resident chef George Nhalingue (ex Azura), the most intuitive personal managers Ashleigh and Marshall Gravett, and a full housekeeping team, you feel like you're staying in a private hotel. Entry is via an expansive courtyard, where a large pool is surrounded by loungers and an alfresco dining area. Views of the sea are through the open-plan living area beyond, with expansive glass doors leading out to a second rim-flow pool giving a bird's-eye view of the coastline. Upstairs on one side of the house is a honeymoon suite so roomy that you could cocoon there for days; on the other is an open-air sala with spectacular views over Bahia de Pescador (Fishermen's Bay) – also a perfect spot for a massage or sundowners. Below are four restful bedrooms, one designed for kids with two truckle beds under the miniature four-posters. Upstairs is a communal computer terminal with internet, and the playroom can be used for travelling au pairs. This is the closest you'll get to barefoot luxury.

Closest town? It is about 25 minutes' drive north of Vilanculos airport.

Sleeps? Ten adults (or eight adults and four children) in five bedrooms.

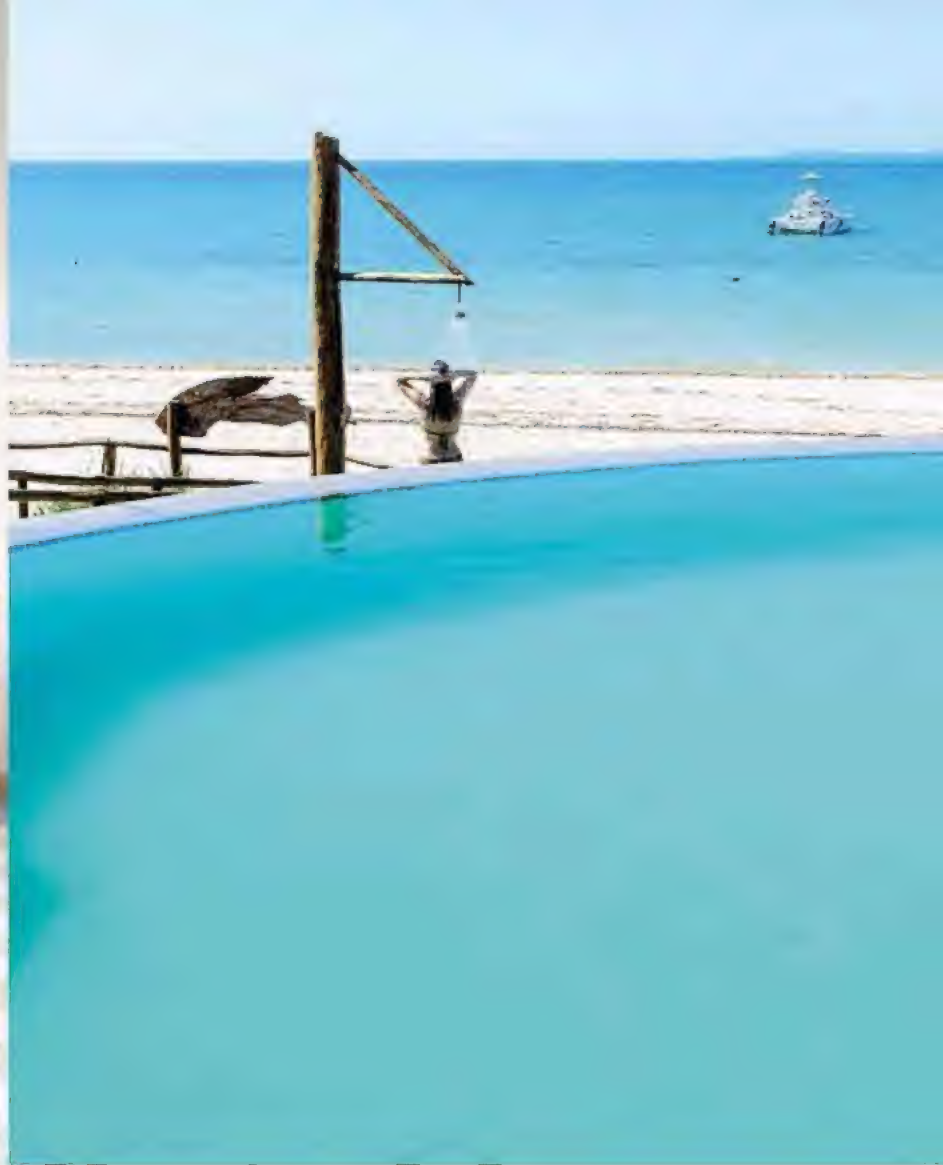
Child-friendly? Yes, all ages most welcome.


Activities? The villa boat is available on request for fishing, snorkelling, diving and island hopping. Horse riding, camel rides, kite surfing and even a market tour can be organised. And there's DSTV and WiFi.

Negatives? It's fairly high up above the beach, although a staircase down the hill is currently under construction.

Cost? Current special R22 000 for the villa a night (about R2 000 pppn) – usually from R28 000 per night (about R2 800 pppn) – including chef, meals, local liquors and security.

Contact Therese Botha, Icon Villas 021 424 0905, therese@icape.co.za; www.iconvillas.travel/properties/view/716





***Inhambane** is an historical town surrounded by lush veggie patches that's bigger than its characterful little airport (with its bright pink loo) would have you believe. As you wander through the flourishing market – which has plenty of fish and fresh produce – shortly after landing, it is clear that this organised little town has been trading for centuries. Everything from rip-off Havaianas to a large plastic bag of roasted cashew nuts for an impossibly low asking price are sold on market day, but the naartjies are sweet and the pawpaws are perfection with squeezed lime and chilli. Established in 1495, it's the oldest European settlement on the east coast of Africa and has an air of faded grandeur, with some beautifully aged buildings still standing the test of time. If your schedule permits, lunch on the best blue crab dishes at Mazaroca, with claws done in a batter of ground cashews, chilli and ginger – delicious with an ice-cold 2M beer. It's a 25-minute drive from Inhambane to Praia da Rocha and a little less to Tofo, so we headed for Praia da Rocha Beach Estate first.*

MOZAMBIQUE MOSAIC

THIS PAGE Sunset spot: sip a caipirinha and watch the tropical clouds from the decks of the Green Turtle restaurant on Barra Beach

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Inhambane airport's crazy-wonderful paint colours; the edible fruit of the toad tree is also used in traditional medicines; classic '70s signage at the airport; beach-house style at Praia da Rocha; fresh fish at Inhambane Market; coconut-husk dune stabilisation at Praia da Rocha; historic Cathedral da Nossa Senhora da Conceição in Inhambane; makeshift roadside soccer pitch; pristine Praia da Rocha beach





***Praia da Rocha** is a beach estate about 25 minutes' drive down the coast and the last seven kilometres are 4x4 territory (or 4x2 with high clearance) – sandy tracks that weave between coconut palms and around village huts. The familiar smell of wood smoke gives way suddenly to the salty onshore breeze that's Praia da Rocha's blessing: it keeps everyone cool and any mosquitoes at bay. Currently, seven of its beach houses are available for rent, but more are being built plus a diving centre and restaurant. Once that's established, a boutique lodge will nestle itself discreetly on the other side of the promontory. What's so special about this spot is its pristine beach, good diving spots and seclusion. It's blissfully tranquil, ideal for anyone wanting to escape to a well-equipped and professionally managed beach house.*

GREAT ESCAPE

THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT Count the whales from this idyllic spot on the deck at The Look Out; fresh coconuts

OPPOSITE The view from The Look Out pool back towards the main beach



THE LOOK OUT

The Look Out is ideal for multigenerational family holidays – there's oodles of space and everyone has some privacy. Surrounded by generous decks with a latte-covered alfresco cooking area, it never seems to feel crowded. The views are truly breathtaking over the stretch of southern coastline towards Guinjata Bay, yet looking back towards Tofo is also beautiful because of the rocky peninsula jutting out from the main beach (there's a cave worth visiting down there and the hidden bay beyond it will be the site of the new boutique lodge). Anyone who loves cooking while chatting to family and friends will enjoy this open-plan kitchen with its stunning views. Fold-back doors literally open up the entire front and side of the living area, which leads to the pool. The position of this house makes it more private than most.

Closest town? Inhambane is 17 kilometres away.

Sleeps? Eleven comfortably (but can sleep 13). The main house has three bedrooms (one king, one double, one three-sleeper with bunk beds and captain's bed – plus two more kids can sleep on the mezzanine level, if necessary). The cottage adjoining the house has two bedrooms (one queen en suite, one king en suite), with outdoor shower and private sun deck. Staff quarters have a bunk bed and shower room.

Child-friendly? Yes.

Activities? Swimming, whale watching, horse riding, sea kayaking, surfing, ocean safaris, windsurfing. TV but bring DSTV decoder and card.

Negatives? It needs some loungers around the pool.

Cost? From R3 800 for the villa in low season, R4 300 mid season, R4 800 peak season (from about R345 to R436 pppn).

Contact Ella Greathead 082 466 9636, ella@pdrbeachestate.com; www.thelookoutatpdr.com

To do... PRAIA DA ROCHA

Snorkel or sail the breezes

Watching whales and dolphins from the deck of your beach house is par for the course in season (June to October for humpbacks, July to October for orcas, November to March for whale sharks), but there are nine dive sites close by (including Manta Reef, only 10 minutes away by boat and deemed to be one of the world's top five) and the bay offers safe swimming, sea kayaking, snorkelling, surfing, deep-sea fishing and magnificent walks – either along the endless beach or through coconut plantations. A new, world-class dive centre will be built at the estate shortly, but the protected bay in front of the beach houses has a shallow reef that's perfect for snorkelling, with wonderful hard and soft corals plus reef fish and good visibility for most of the year. Manta rays are often seen basking here.

But for a unique experience, put aside a day for a dhow trip to Pansy Island in the Inhambane Bay. Ask Chris Greathead at the estate to book Enrique 'Rick' Mbata (+258 84 879 0479) to take you across to the sandy spit (pack umbrella, snorkels and fins, sunscreen, a picnic and lots to drink) where you'll spot pansy shells in abundance. Enrique sets sail from White Sands at the end of Barra Beach. He speaks only Portuguese and his dhow is as authentic as they come – patchworked sail, punt, one or two oars and no outboard engine or life jackets. That said, the trip is across mostly shallow waters where outsized mangrove crabs dance a jig beneath you. It's idyllic out there, but on a hot day plan to go early and leave by around 3pm. From R400 to R500 for the day.

End the day with a heavenly meal on the beach at the Green Turtle (at Bayview Lodge along Barra Beach), owned by French couple Joëlle and François Chapuis. Their crab and fish dishes are by far the best here. Call +258 82 026 0580.



CYCAD LODGE

Set on the beach, Cycad Lodge is perfect for large family groups. It has jaw-dropping views of the main beach and entire coastline from the pool and covered bar area on the lower deck. The lounge area opens up with fold-back doors and the outside braai and seating area at the back of the house are protected from prevailing winds. Full DSTV television and decoder are provided. This house is in one of the best positions.

Closest town? Inhambane is 16 kilometres away.

Sleeps? Twelve in five bedrooms (two queens and two twins, which share two bathrooms and outdoor showers, plus a separate kids' bunk room that sleeps four with its own en-suite shower).

Child-friendly? Yes, although pool requires supervision.

Activities? Good swimming, diving and snorkelling, fishing charters, dhow trips, birding.

Negatives? The bedroom decor is identical on the left and right of the house – but this prevents arguments about who gets which room.

Costs? From R1 900 low season, R2 700 mid season, R3 700 high season (from about R158 to R308 pppn).

Contact Melissa Geldenhuys 072 965 7165, rentals@shareafrica.co.za, www.shareafrica.co.za or Ella Greathead 082 466 9636, ella@pdrbeachestate.com; www.pdrbeachestate.com

SUNSET LODGE

Smaller than the other houses at Praia da Rocha (three en-suite bedrooms) and further away from the beach, Sunset Lodge has the advantage of sitting on top of the dune, with views right along the coast to Tofo as well as inland over a sea of swaying palms. You could spend the entire day on the wonderfully welcoming deck with its plunge pool set out on a raised deck to take in the best of the views and the sunsets. A lovely villa for a small family that doesn't want to share.

Closest town? Inhambane.

Sleeps? Six (one king with en-suite bathroom, one queen, one twin room and two bathrooms).

Child-friendly? Yes.

Activities? Swimming, horse riding, sea kayaking, surfing, ocean safaris, windsurfing, DSTV.

Negatives? It's the most elevated property so is further from the beach (a five-minute walk), but the flipside is its spectacular views.

Cost? From R1 800 low season, R2 400 mid season, R3 500 peak season (from about R300 to R583 pppn).

Contact Ella Greathead 082 466 9636, ella@pdrbeachestate.com, www.pdrbeachestate.com

THE BEACH HOUSE

The Beach House is 70 metres from the beach in the second row. The lower deck area has built-in seating and a covered area for dining around the pool. The main house has two double bedrooms, a kid's bunk room and an open-plan living area with fold-back doors opening to the covered entertainment deck. The kids' room has three bunk beds for six very excited little holidaymakers. There's a new en-suite double room with outside shower in a separate cottage near the pool and lower deck area. All bedrooms have air-con.

Closest town Inhambane.

Sleeps Twelve in four rooms (two kings, one double and a six-sleeper bunk room).

Child-friendly? Yes.

Activities? Swimming, horse riding, sea kayaking, surfing, ocean safaris, windsurfing, TV provided but guests need to bring a decoder and card.

Negatives? It's not right on the beach, but the house is still wonderful for kids.

Cost? From R2 000 low season, R3 200 mid season, R4 200 peak season (from about R167 to R350 pppn).

Contact Ella Greathead 082 466 9636, ella@pdrbeachestate.com, www.pdrbeachestate.com





LAZY STAYS

OPPOSITE Cycad Lodge overlooks the main beach where you can spend hours snorkelling or take a walk around the point to see if you can spot a manta basking in the clear blue waters

THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT Alfresco shower at The Beach House; pathway to the south beach from The Look Out; bird's-eye coastal view from Sunset Lodge; kids' bunks in The Beach House



NOT JUST ANOTHER BEACH DEVELOPMENT...


Chris and Ella Greathead, who manage Praia da Rocha Beach Estate, were previously with Wilderness Safaris and then built the villas on Vamizi island. Their hospitality and management experience extends to everyone who stays here and their knowledge is invaluable. The Praia da Rocha project employs local women in the village to hand-weave the *makuti* palm-thatch roofing and even the village chief was involved in laying coconut husks to stabilise the dunes. With long-term skills development in mind, Praia da Rocha currently employs up to 120 local residents, and a borehole has been installed at the local community school, which will also receive free electricity generated by the estate's wind turbine, which supplies clean energy to the houses.

Currently, the biological diversity is exceptional, so as much care as possible is taken to protect the unbleached coral reefs, dunes with endemic cycads, grass plains and exposed dolerite outcrops. Over 180 recorded species of bird and 300 species of reef and pelagic fish have been recorded off its beaches. Large marine mammals include baleen whales, toothed whales and five different species of dolphin, manta rays, whale sharks and three species of turtle. Find out more on www.pdrbeachestate.com.

DREAM ON

THIS PAGE Anyone for a candlelit dinner in a cave? This one is just around the corner from the site where there are plans to build an unobtrusive boutique lodge opposite Casa de Coca's main bedroom. All the houses have high-quality mosquito nets, but because of its sea breezes Praia da Rocha doesn't get many mozzies



A photograph of a bedroom interior. The ceiling is made of thick wooden beams and a thatched roof of dried palm fronds. A white ceiling fan is mounted on the ceiling. A mosquito net is hung from a wooden beam, framing a bed with a blue and white striped bedsheet. The room is brightly lit, likely from a window on the right.

CASA DE COCA

Set on the beach and decorated in white-washed beach-house style, this relaxed villa is ideal for a family that values privacy. It's the smallest house on the beachfront, but it feels spacious. There's a protected area on the side of the house with pub-style table for alfresco eating. On a lower deck, the swimming pool has a shaded area for sweltering hot days and there's a shower on the path up from the beach. Note that smoking is not permitted.

Closest town? Inhambane.

Sleeps? Six in three bedrooms (two queens and one twin).

Child-friendly? Yes, but no children under 12.

Activities? Swimming, horse riding, sea kayaking, surfing, ocean safaris. DSTV provided (compact).

Negatives? You can't take young children so not suitable for all families.

Cost? R2 000 low season, R2 500 mid season, R3 500 peak season (from about R333 to R583 pppn).

Contact Ella Greathead 082 466 9636, ella@pdrbeachestate.com, www.pdrbeachestate.com



Tofo

The village of Tofo and its beautiful beach steal everyone's hearts with their swaying palms, bird-filled mangroves and happy-go-lucky atmosphere. It's the place to come to dive and see mantas and whale sharks, so ocean safaris are big business here and it bustles day and night in season. The village is also part backpacker haven, with a reputation as a hippy paradise – the centre of town is great for hard-core party animals, but those seeking 24-hour tranquillity may want to stay on the outskirts of Tofo. Surfers head for the point break at Tofinho Beach and yogis go to Turtle Cove in Tofo. Also popular is Barra Beach for great snorkelling, or head for White Sands (a tidal mangrove where you can spot seahorses) to kayak or sail on a dhow across Inhambane Bay. Afterwards, book at the Green Turtle on Barra Beach for dinner – expect all the local delicacies including plenty of crab and smoked barracuda. Petrol and cash can be found at the new filling station on the road out of Tofo (this is essential information), where the forecourt also happens to have a life-saving deli called Chilli. Before leaving for the airport on the way back, remember to phone ahead to order their delicious sandwiches (and stock up on a few bottles of certified-organic coconut oil for your skin, too).

KODAK MOMENTS

THIS PAGE The sandy track that takes you along the coast from Mango Beach Resort to Barra

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT While some buildings lack architectural style, they make up for it in colour choice; tropical vegetation; shower under the stars at Vanilla View; chilli and cassava at Inhambane Market; a main bedroom at Mango Beach; deep-sea fishing from Casa Barry; buy fruit for breakfast at Tofo's market; pop into Chilli Deli for good coffee and other treats; the pool at Vanilla View overlooks the garden and mangrove beyond





To do... TOFO **Dive with whale sharks**

In season, Tofo is packed with travellers from all over the world that come to dive its teeming waters or to do an ocean safari and snorkel with its gentle giants, the whale sharks. Diversity Scuba has been around the longest and its experienced PADI professionals offer a full range of PADI training courses.

Diversity Scuba ocean safaris cost R365. To book, contact +258 293 29002, info@diversityscuba.com, www.diversityscuba.com.

Tofo is also a valued centre of research and Dr Andrea Marshall and Dr Simon Pierce of the Foundation for the Protection of Marine Megafauna (FPM, www.marinemegafauna.org) are leading the way in manta and whale shark research. They're based behind Casa Barry and near Peri-Peri Divers, where you can hear them speak each week. Andrea is known as the 'Queen of Mantas' and does eco dives every Wednesday with a maximum of six people, and Simon, the 'Whale Shark Whisperer', does a two- to three-hour eco safari with a maximum of eight people every Friday. Peri Peri specialises in smaller, more personalised dive groups.

To book or for more info, +258 882 596 4717, info@peri-peridivers.com or visit www.peri-peridivers.com. Other activities in Tofo include yoga classes at Turtle Cove Studio (+258 82 719 4848, www.turtlecove.tofo.com).

Turtle Cove will also organise everything from spa massages to surf lessons.



FOOD FOR THE SOUL

Vanilla View is the ultimate romantic
retreat – think sensual luxury,
architectural design and dream hosts



ED'S
CHOICE

VANILLA VIEW

By far the most architecturally interesting and romantic villa on the coastline, Vanilla View overlooks the mangrove behind Tofo Beach. Reached via a short sandy track past a few rustic dwellings and some chickens, Vanilla View's position is perfect if you want a sophisticated, cocooned honeymoon hideaway or time to chill as a family in your own space. While you can hear the waves from your bed, you are far enough away from the music that sometimes rocks Tofo at night. Vanilla View's perfectly considered interiors have handcrafted and carefully chosen furnishings that, together with its beautifully equipped kitchen, set it apart. Even the slide-back walls (yes, they literally roll away to open up each room) make this a tropical haven you'll never want to leave. You'll shower under the stars, sleep in luxurious linens with an unspoilt view of the mangrove and sink into the memory-foam cushions surrounding the firepit outdoors with a G&T in hand wishing you could stay forever.

Closest town? Tofo is just 1,5 kilometres away.

Sleeps? Up to six (three en-suite kings each with private open-air showers plus sunken bath in the main bedroom).

Child-friendly? Yes. The enormous grassy garden overlooks the mangroves and the pool is close to the kitchen for easy supervision.

Activities? The beach is a short drive away around the mangrove (1.5km) and the managers are always happy to provide transfers.

Negatives? None at all!

Cost? R5 400 a night for the villa (about R900 pppn).

Contact Casper van der Merwe and Hein Scheffer +258 84 026 3390, +258 84 815 1157, cdesign76@live.co.za, www.cafenomar.com



CASA ALGODOAL

Invisible from the beach because it's set at the end of a coconut-wood pathway high in the casuarina trees, this little find is one of the few traditional double-storey casas built of wood with a *makuti* palm-frond roof that's open to the elements on one side. The entire front view is unspoilt because it has no wall, but the house can be protected by a fabric blind that covers the front if necessary. And just in case you're wondering: yes, both bedrooms are accessed through glass doors with locks on the lower floor! The upper mezzanine level is for relaxing and has L-shaped seating that can be converted into two additional beds. The kitchen is fully equipped (with a fridge/freezer and stove), bathrooms have a bath and an outside shower, and there's a full-time guard plus housekeeping three days a week (this can be extended to five on request). There are spare surfboards to use, and a pizza oven in the garden. Named after an equally relaxing beach cottage in Brazil, Casa Algodoal is often booked out way ahead.

Closest town? Tofo (Casa Algodoal overlooks Tofo Beach).

Sleeps? Four in two bedrooms downstairs (plus two people can sleep upstairs in the lounge area).

Child-friendly? Yes.

Activities? Surf lessons, kayaking, kite surfing, horse safaris, but mostly enjoying the beach at the bottom of the garden. Visit one of the main dive centres or the market, which are a short walk along the beach to the left, or watch the fishermen bring in their catch of the day to the right of the beach, below Casa Barry restaurant.

Negatives? The two extra beds are upstairs are on a mezzanine level above the open-plan lounge, which is completely open-walled.

Cost? From R1 530 for the casa in low season, R1 835 high season (from about R255 to R306 pppn). (Rates are due to increase soon.)

Contact Nobina Morimoto +258 845 646 554, casaalgodoal@hotmail.com; www.casaalgodoal.com

BRIGHT AND BREEZY

THIS PAGE Casa Algodoal is hidden in the trees right above Toto Beach

OPPOSITE, FROM FAR LEFT The outdoor sunken bath and double showers of the main bedroom at Vanilla View; Casa Algodoal's living area is open to the elements, giving a wonderful sense of real beach living





TROPICAL HAUTE

THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Tropical greenery at Mango Beach; the upstairs main bedroom at House Bergh, just across the road from Tofinho Beach, a magnet for surfers; Mango Beach's open-walled restaurant on top of the dunes overlooks the sea; additional beds in the living area of a Mango Beach casa

OPPOSITE Mango Beach Resort's casas are set in a sea of gently rustling coconut palms



MANGO BEACH RESORT

Ideal for families, each charming casa – set in a bushy, tropical palm grove – has its own basic kitchen (small fridge/freezer, gas cooker), bathroom and two separate bedrooms. Palm-covered stoeps are perfect for alfresco dining. The casas are relatively private yet close enough together to book several with a group of friends. It's pure paradise for free-roaming children who love the fact that they can order their own cooldrink at the open-air restaurant above the beach and play in the sand below while their parents sit back and order another platter of seafood. The setting is blissfully peaceful, but Mango Beach is very rustic – perfect for down-to-earth types not looking for five-star luxury.

Closest town? Tofo is just 3,3 kilometres south of Mango Beach.

Sleeps? Up to six. There are three casas and each sleeps four in two bedrooms (one double, one twin) and two singles in the living area.

Child-friendly? Absolutely. Its reef has great rock pools and offers safe snorkelling at high tide that even five-year-olds will enjoy.

Activities? Ocean safaris, surfing at nearby Tofinho Beach, snorkelling, diving, sea kayaking on Inhambane lagoon (hire at Barra), horse riding.

Negatives? Erratic hot-water supply, and the casas are not particularly well-equipped, so bring your own kitchen essentials and spare linen.

Cost? From R665 low season, R1 330 high season per casa per night (from about R111 to R222 pppn).

Contact Paul or Jacqui +258 829 434 660, bookings@mangobeach.co.za; www.mangobeach.co.za

HOUSE BERGH

Guests staying at House Bergh always comment on the whale and dolphin viewing from its deck, which overlooks Tofinho Beach. This leads off a large, family-friendly open-plan dining area and kitchen, with an outside prep area for fish and a Weber braai.

Closest town Tofo.

Sleeps? Ten in four en-suite bedrooms, all with mosquito nets (suits two couples and six kids) but can sleep up to 12.

Child-friendly? Not for toddlers (balcony is unprotected) but heaven for teens.

Activities? The best beach is a few steps away (this is surfer's paradise) but all the options in Tofo are just minutes away.

Any negatives? The house next door is not attractive, and a dirt road and power line run between the house and the beach. The back courtyard is rather featureless.

Cost? R1 750 to R3 750 a night (about R175 to R375 pppn).

Contact Casey Claxton at Tofo Travel +258 82 426 5840, tofotravel@gmail.com or Yola Bergh 027 482 2062 or 084 460 8136.

CASA JOHN IS ANOTHER ACCOMMODATION OPTION. At the end of Tofinho Beach, it has sheltered, grassy gardens. The casas, which are a little close together, sleep up to six. From R1 100 to R2 750 a casa a night (about R183 to R458 pppn). Contact 082 451 7498, john@casajohn.co.za; www.casajohn.co.za

GETTING THERE Federal Air flies from Joburg to Vilanculos, from R1 857 to R3 267 one-way. Flights also depart from Nelspruit on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday (with an additional R99 airport tax) but there are only direct flights back from Vilanculos to Joburg, so if combining safari and beach, plan your safari first. Fedair has a range of fares from the more affordable Beach Super Saver to the Platinum fare for those who need flexibility. Call 011 395 9000 or book online on www.fedair.com. • LAM (Mozambique Airlines, www.lam.co.mz/en) flies this route too, and also connects with Inhambane and Maputo. Most flights fly back via Vilanculos to Johannesburg. • It takes around four hours to drive between Tofo and Inhambane at the moment and the EN1 (Estrada Nacional) is currently in good condition, but the flight takes a mere 45 minutes. • Driving from Johannesburg via Grijpdonk Border Post in the northern Kruger is also easier now that the road has been tarred from there to the coast (the route heads for Xai-Xai and then up the EN1), so you can easily do a safari-to-beach holiday in a two-week period.





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+258 (0) 84 678 2800/+ 27 (0)82 741 5594; arina@goldenshores.co.za



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South of the Bazaruto Archipelago, perched on the peninsula furthest out to sea, Nyati Beach Lodge offers you the perfect breakaway – be it for leisure, sport, adventure or romance. Take in the spectacular views while enjoying a variety of activities and excursions to keep you entertained and relaxed. Our personal and attentive service is just one of the qualities that will make your stay at Nyati memorable.

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Casa Howard feels like the very upmarket home of arty, slightly eccentric friends



UNDER THE TUSCAN MOON

**FLORENCE LEADS A HOTEL RENAISSANCE IN ITALY WITH DESIGN-FORWARD INNS
JUST A STROLL FROM THE DUOMO**

WORDS GEORGE W STONE

No one ever accused Tuscany's capital of being sleepy. But these days, this Renaissance hub is humming with boutique hotels that redefine classic Florentine style with a few modern twists. Here are five that would keep Galileo's starry nights aglow and his slumbers decidedly stylish.



Hotel Brunelleschi



Gallery Hotel Art



Casa Howard



JK Place

Hotel Brunelleschi

A resurrected Byzantine tower and a medieval church serve as the architectural cornerstones of this renovated, 95-room hotel two blocks from the Duomo. Named for the architect of Florence's signature feat of engineering, the Brunelleschi mixes classic elements (a cellar museum displays relics from the Roman baths that once occupied this spot) and designer touches (suites feature crystal lamps, violet silk curtains and silvery velvet headboards). Located near high-end boutiques on Via dei Calzaiuoli, the hotel also offers luxurious views of the city. Doubles from R3 520; www.brunelleschihotelflorence.com

Casa Howard

More pied-à-terre than hotel, this small inn near Piazza di Santa Maria Novella consists of 13 individually designed, sun-soaked rooms and suites that accommodate every need (including those of travelling dogs). The two-floor Studio Room channels a New York loft, complete with a spiral staircase. The elegant Drawing Room conveys an Oscar Wildean vibe with Venetian mosaic marble floors and a view of Via della Scala. Two pluses: the inn's cooking classes and the fragrant soaps from Officina Profumo di Santa Maria Novella. Doubles from R1 285; www.casahoward.com

Gallery Hotel Art

Taking a cue from his father, designer Salvatore Ferragamo, hotelier Leonardo Ferragamo has placed his family's fashionable stamp on the hospitality biz. The result is five hotels within a block of the Ponte Vecchio, each emphasising different aspects of Italian design. Among the more notable is the retro-cool hotel Continentale, a 1950s jet set-style expression of pink and black overlooking the Arno. The Gallery Hotel Art features contemporary creativity with its showcase of rotating artwork by such luminaries as Laura Letinsky and Martin Schoeller. Its 74 rooms are compact spaces decked out in creamy fabrics and gallery-worthy photography. Doubles from R2 795; www.lungarnocollection.com

JK Place

Florence has always been a city of the world, and this 20-room hotel drives that point home with interior design that pulls together Chinese chairs, Moroccan lanterns, zebra-pattern ottomans, Tibetan artefacts and other elements of global style. The dominant mood is one of clean-lined sophistication, making this hotel feel like a private townhouse. Guests can sip prosecco cocktails in the art deco lounge before taking in the Gothic and early-Renaissance frescoes of Santa Maria Novella church nearby. Doubles from R3 850, including breakfast; www.jkplace.com

Hotel Rosso 23

This affordable inn across from Piazza di Santa Maria Novella is awash in the colour red. While the *camere* (rooms) are mostly utilitarian grey, a crimson tide accents robes, slippers, carpets, couches and vaulted ceiling panels. The effect is as energising as the large-format prints of Florentine façades that decorate the hotel. Doubles from R1 256 including breakfast; www.hotelrosso23.com

How to make the most of a day in Florence

Gucci, Pucci and the Pitti Palace can wait. Here are five little pleasures that make a day in Florence come alive.

The bite Grab a wild boar salami and truffle cream sandwich at I Due Fratellini, a hole-in-the-wall lunch stop near the Palazzo Vecchio.

The glove Cross the Ponte Vecchio and head to Madova, a tiny boutique with a singular passion for making Florentine gloves in buttery leather and audacious colours.

The view Hike up the steep hill to San Miniato al Monte for a panoramic view of the city.

The gelati Everyone in Florence has a favourite gelato place. High marks go to Grom, which scoops up *caramello al sale*, a tasty caramel and pink sea salt confection.

The smell Walk into the Santa Maria Novella Pharmacy (Via della Scala 16) and you will be transported to another time. Established in 1221 by Dominican monks who made balms, salves and medicines from herbs, it's undoubtedly the oldest pharmacy in Italy, housed in a magnificent building complete with vaulted ceilings, frescoes, marble floors and views onto an internal garden. The soaps and bath oils are incredible, so this is a good place to stock up.



EASY STREET
On Sundays,
Plaza Dorrego and
surrounding streets
become an art and
antiques market



BUENOS AIRES *Soul*

IN THE MID-19TH CENTURY, Buenos Aires's wealthiest families lived in **San Telmo**, south of downtown. But an 1870s yellow fever epidemic sent the well-to-do packing, their former digs repopulated by Spanish and Italian immigrants. The resulting cultural stew gave rise to tango and a robust street life. Today, crumbling mansions lining the cobblestone streets are being renovated to house cutting-edge restaurants and shops. 'There's a re-evaluation of the historical centre of the city,' says Aldo Graziani, owner of Aldo's Vinoteca. 'San Telmo is the summary of who we are in Buenos Aires.' Walking San Telmo reveals how Argentina's capital looks toward the future while holding on to its past.

Museo de la Ciudad (1) Nicknamed Buenos Aires's attic, this kitschy museum displays homey 100-year-old objects such as porcelain and lace dolls, dishes and bicycles – many from Italian immigrants. A working vintage pharmacy features a ceiling adorned in art nouveau paintings of sinuous foliage.

Aldo's Vinoteca (2) Wine bar and restaurant Aldo's boasts a 500-bottle wine list, presented on an iPad, which highlights top producers from Argentine wine regions Mendoza, Neuquén and Cafayate. Young, casual patrons pair selections with steaks and Mediterranean cuisine.

Boutique Pablo Ramírez (3) Ramírez's classic tailored designs for women are high fashion with value. He chose San Telmo for his store location because the area 'has a lot of poetry and a soul'. Every clothing design comes in travel-friendly black.

Nora Iniesta (4) Nora Iniesta incorporates found objects (buttons, toys) and historical Argentine subjects – including iconic images of beloved former first lady Evita Perón – into her paintings, decorative objects and clothing accessories. Her appointment-only boutique makes a great stop for arty souvenirs.

La Vineria de Gualterio Bolívar (5) Buenos Aires excels at experimental cuisine, exemplified by this tiny, easily missed bistro. Chef Alejandro Digilio applies molecular cooking principles, using few ingredients but each with strong flavour contrasts. Try the prawns with black garlic and mushrooms.

San Telmo Antiques Fair (6) This Sunday-only antiques, leather and crafts fair centres on Plaza Dorrego, where an open-air tango event also takes place. Scour stalls for items such as old political buttons and Argentine comic books.

– Michael Luongo



Los Angeles WITH KIDS

With no admission charge, the **Santa Monica Pier**, jutting over the Pacific, is a terrific option for families that don't want to spend their entire day – or budget – at a theme park. You pay R40 to ride the oceanfront roller coaster, the 1922 carousel or the Ferris wheel.

The ocean water warms enough for swimming in September. At the beach just south of the pier, kids gravitate toward the gauntlet of climbing ropes and monkey bars. Snack on corn dogs at the original **Hot Dog on a Stick**, a local institution since 1946.

A visit to the **Skirball Cultural Center** is like a backstage pass to *The Lion King*. Here, the Noah's Ark gallery is filled with a menagerie of animals sculpted from recycled materials.

All that is great about food in LA is under one roof at the original **Farmers Market**, including fresh produce, doughnut shops, taco stands and sit-down Korean and Cajun restaurants. One standout: **Dupars**, a 24-hour diner known for its massive breakfasts.

The Amazing Race scavenger hunt challenges minds and bodies at some of the city's popular attractions. Kids 10 and older help decipher clues to each successive location. The race is held on weekends year-round.

– John Rosenthal

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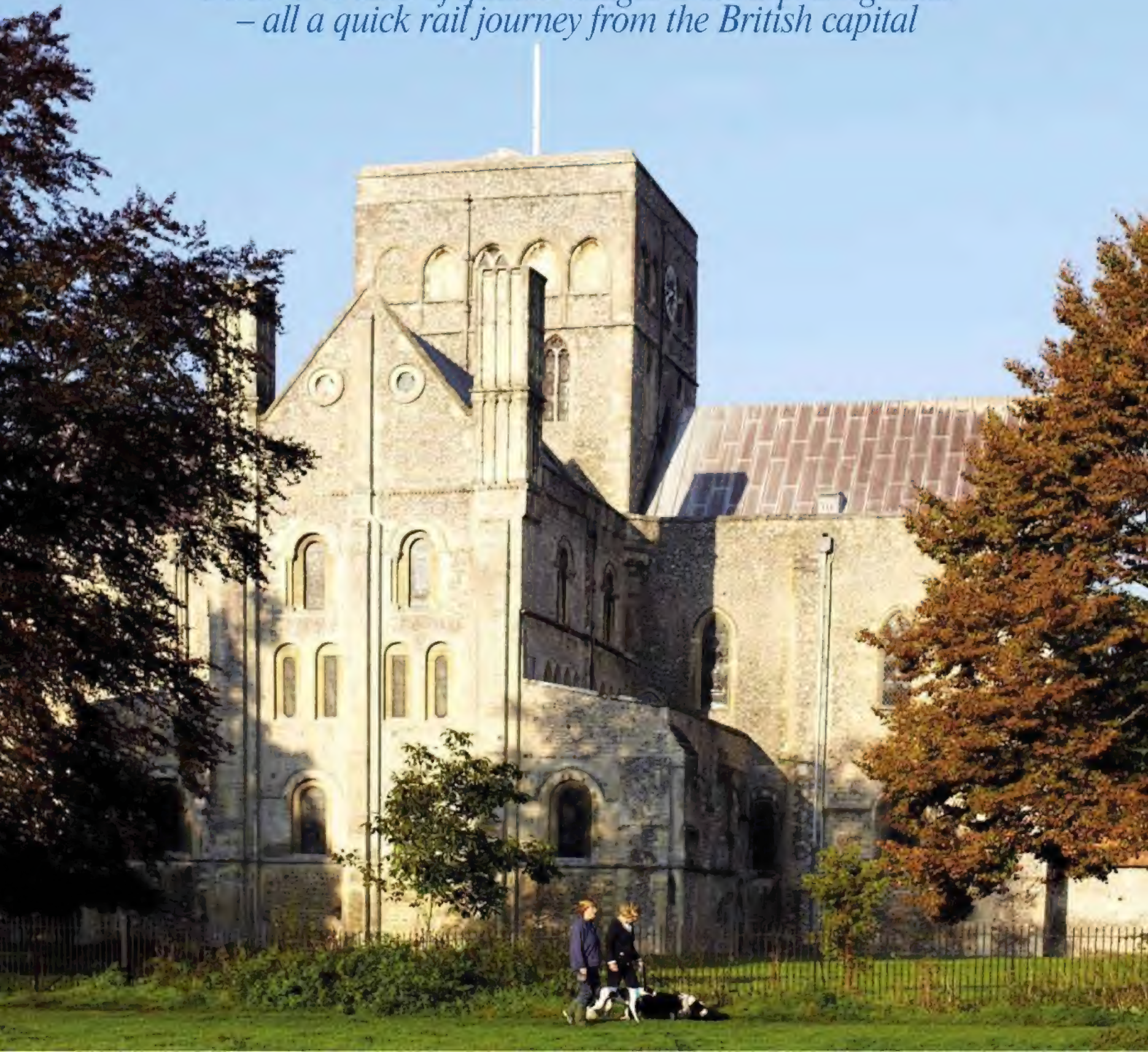
THIS PAGE A Watercress Line steam train pulls into the town of Alresford, Essex
OPPOSITE Jane Austen was buried in the north aisle of Winchester Cathedral, originally consecrated in 1093

Photo credit: iStockphoto.com
www.istockphoto.com

LEAVING LONDON

{5 GREAT GETAWAYS BY TRAIN}

*Discover a land of quaint villages and surprising cities
– all a quick rail journey from the British capital*



London made Olympian efforts to ready itself for the 2012 Summer Games, but within 160 kilometres of the big city are destinations that capture the essence of what makes England a true winner for travellers. Yes, there are castles, prehistoric hilltop standing stones and elegant Georgian terraces along south-coast beaches, but there are also many unexpected travel treasures. England's heartland cities and dockside towns have emerged from a post-industrial gloom to become arts, design and culinary hubs, while pages from Victorian novels can be relived in country-house hotels that now favour chic over chintz. Escape the city and you'll get a taste of authentic British – and even French – cultures, both contemporary and historical. Here we give you five itineraries, with insider tips from the editors at our UK edition, National Geographic Traveller.

{TO THE MANOR BORN}

Hampshire & Salisbury

TRAVEL TIME: 90 MINUTES FROM WATERLOO TO SALISBURY

Wind along the sweeping drive toward Highclere Castle – the setting for *Downton Abbey*, the Emmy Award-winning period drama of upstairs-downstairs life at an English mansion – and the world of the Crawleys and their servants slowly emerges. The pinnacled Victorian pile, atop a thousand acres of parkland, is an evocative place to start exploring historical fantasies and realities: 'Let the building show you the way,' says current chatelaine Lady Carnarvon.

Built on the site of a medieval banqueting hall, the castle – with 250-year-old cedars, wild flowers and sheep dotting the grounds – lies near Newbury, 96 kilometres west of London. It offers panoramic views across the wooded slopes and rolling downlands of North Hampshire.

From Highclere, head southwest to Salisbury, the cathedral city immortalised in John Constable's 19th-century landscape paintings. Salisbury's medieval cathedral holds the best preserved copy of the *Magna Carta* – the 1215 charter of citizens' rights familiar to every civics student. Climb Britain's tallest spire to see Salisbury's water meadows; the ditches and sluices once used for irrigation are now populated by wading birds and turquoise damselflies. Near the cathedral, stallholders selling hog roasts, honey, olives and English wines gather for the Charter Market, held twice weekly since the 13th century.

At St Thomas's Church, where the cathedral builders worshipped, look out for the giant 'Doom' painting: 'The alewife giving the devil a jug of ale was modelled on a local brothel keeper,' says Michael Bowyer, a Chelsea Flower Show gold medallist who designs the cathedral's floral displays. Follow up with cream teas and croquet at Mompesson House, where some scenes from *Sense and Sensibility* (starring Kate Winslet) were filmed.

A few kilometres away stands Stonehenge, the 'heathen temple' of stone slabs on Salisbury Plain where Thomas Hardy's tragic heroine Tess of the d'Urbervilles was arrested. Further south, lose yourself in the depths of the New Forest, one of Britain's newest national parks, just as Tess did in Hardy's novel. With wild ponies, snug pubs and fine weather, the park is walkers' and cyclists' heaven. Outfitter Cyclexperience (www.newforestcyclehire.co.uk) has tandems for hire.

Bed down in Brockenhurst at the Pig, an ivy-clad country house hotel with log fires, oak floors and a walled garden that supplies the kitchen with fruit, vegetables and herbs. Join the hotel's wild-food forager, Garry Eveleigh, to find New Forest delicacies such as rose hips, hazelnuts and mushrooms for the Pig's menus. 'Everyone who walks with me is blown away by the sheer beauty of the forest, the wildlife and the food you can find. It's a magical place,' says Eveleigh. His ingredient hunts take him as far as the south coast for seaweed and shellfish.

Pick up the trail to Tess's final destination, Wintoncester – or Winchester, as it's known in real life. Gastronomes regularly make the pilgrimage to eat at the Chesil Rectory, which serves up classics including Sunday roasts and gooseberry fool in Winchester's oldest house. Michelin-starred modern British cooking, strong on local produce, awaits at the Black Rat. Ginger Two combines tea and cakes with quirky home accessories in its boutique/café.

The Hat Fair, Britain's longest running street-theatre festival, takes place in Winchester in July. Acrobats, puppeteers and fire performers breathe fresh life into the town's narrow lanes.

Beneath the streets, in Winchester Cathedral's crypt, Antony Gormley's 'Sound II' sculpture depicts a solitary figure, head bent, around which the waters that flood the space ebb and flow. A black tombstone marks Jane Austen's grave inside the cathedral – 'a building she admired so much', according to her sister, Cassandra.

In the nearby village of Chawton, the red-brick cottage where Austen wrote *Emma* is now an intimate museum. Jane's small wooden writing table still stands by the window, overlooking thatched cottages and fields little changed since her time.

Afterward, it's 16 kilometres on to Alresford (pronounced allsford). Here you can hop on the Watercress Line steam railway for the 40-minute ride to Alton and a connecting train to London. Colin Firth is reported to have a home in Alresford, a riverside market town with brightly painted Georgian houses, antiques shops, inns and even a duck pond. It's every inch the bucolic England of Hollywood imagination.

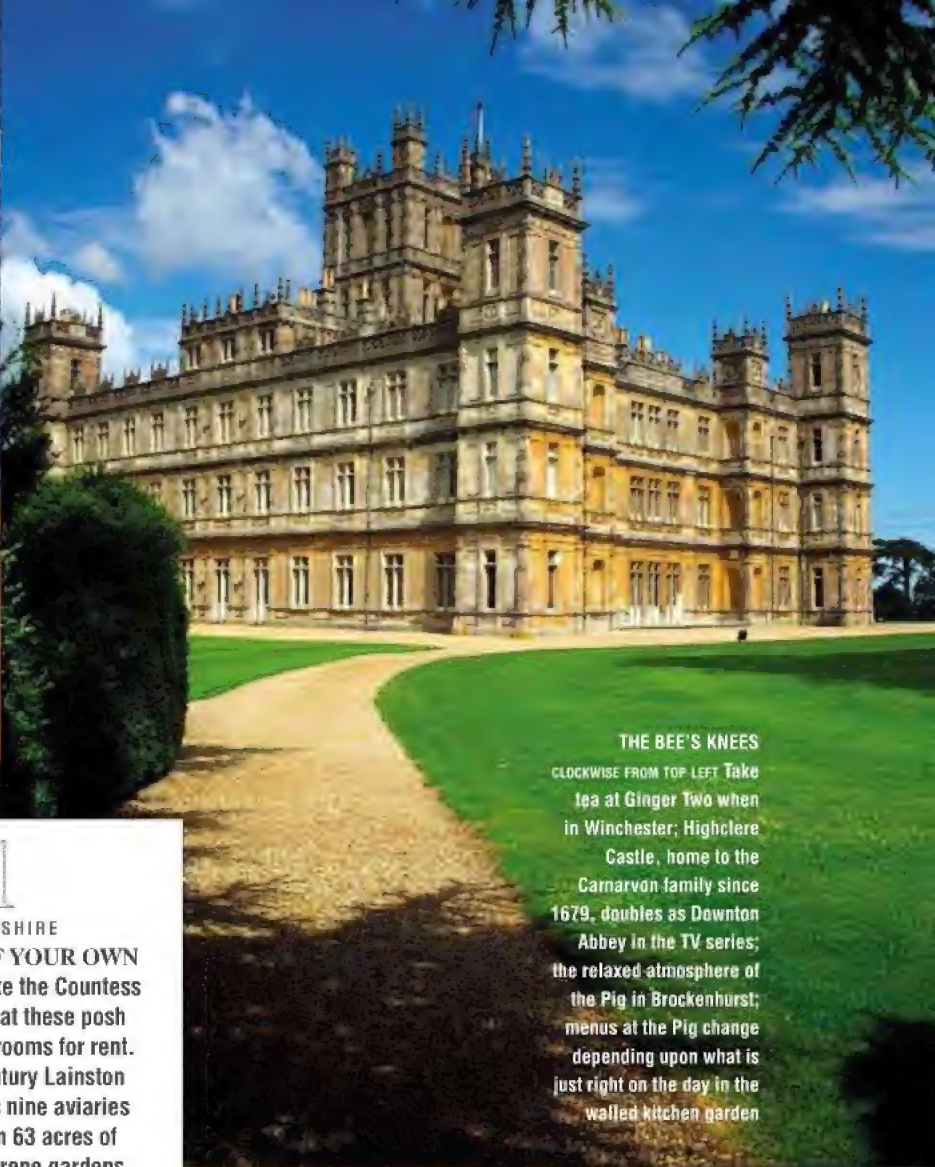
– Juliana Gilling



1

HAMPSHIRE

ESTATES OF YOUR OWN
Swan about like the Countess of Grantham at these posh manses with rooms for rent. The 17th-century Lainston House boasts nine aviaries and is set on 63 acres of parkland. Serene gardens surround the Victorian-era Tynney Hall, where guests take tea in a lounge whose ornate ceiling was imported piece by piece from a Florentine palace. Jane Austen herself may have visited Langrish House, just a few kilometres from her cottage in Chawton.



THE BEE'S KNEES

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Take tea at Ginger Two when in Winchester; Highclere Castle, home to the Carnarvon family since 1679, doubles as Downton Abbey in the TV series; the relaxed atmosphere of the Pig in Brockenhurst; menus at the Pig change depending upon what is just right on the day in the walled kitchen garden



Brighton & the South Downs

TRAVEL TIME: 1 HOUR FROM VICTORIA STATION

No British city embodies full-blown English eccentricity better than Brighton. Blame it on George IV. He built the loopy, orientalist-inspired Royal Pavilion here as his seaside escape, helping to transform the relatively sedate fishing village of Brighthelmston into a fashionable Regency-era retreat. Yet Brighton is also the gateway to the South Downs and that quintessentially English ritual of the country walk. You can experience both the peculiar and the pastoral sides of the British personality after a quick trip south from London.

'Brighton is where kitsch meets sassy glamour,' says club promoter Ruth Allsop. 'You can feel the buzz of the city as soon as you step off the train. Even the colours seem brighter.' As the planner of Margot's Parties – held annually at various local clubs (about R127 for tickets) – Allsop should know. She also suggests heading to the Concorde, 'a spit-and-sawdust venue for live bands right on the beach'. Local DJ and artist Jacqueline Hammond recommends the Brighton Ballroom, an historic glass-domed building in the bohemian gay enclave of Kemptown that presents burlesque, cabaret and speakeasies. Traditionalists will appreciate the Brighton Bandstand beyond the romantically decaying West Pier, where brass bands perform in the briny ocean air. The newest seaside attraction is the 50-metre-high Brighton Wheel, which provides aerial views of Brighton Pier's old-fashioned funfair rides, arcade games and kiosks selling sticks of Brighton's signature candy rock.

By day, Brighton's anything-goes vibe infuses North Laine, a maze of cafés and boutiques. To check out the vibrant local art scene, stroll down to the waterfront, where the Jag Gallery opens its working studios to visitors. Brighton claims the best vegetarian restaurant in the country, Terre à Terre on East Street, which serves such fare as red onion, mustardseed and cumin crumpets with ginger chilli jam. Make a final Brighton pilgrimage to the grave of one Phoebe Hessel (1713–1821) in the cemetery of St Nicholas's Church. Hessel cross-dressed as a man for 17 years to make her living as an active soldier, escaped from a workhouse at the spry age of 93 and became a local celebrity supported by the Prince Regent. Call her the unstoppable patron saint of Brighton.

Then head for the South Downs Way, a 160-kilometre trail that winds from the beech woods of Hampshire to the chalk ridges of East Sussex. Following the path east from Brighton, stop at Alfriston, the type of quaint English village in which Miss Marple might live. The Bloomsbury artists (Virginia Woolf and her sister, Vanessa Bell, among them) roosted at nearby Charleston Farmhouse, a country home bursting with their murals, textiles, and sculptures. The walk's real climax, though, lies toward the finish line, at the Seven Sisters. This undulating series of chalk cliffs, topped by a green tuft of meadow, looks as bleached as an iceberg. In its own way, it's as flamboyantly dramatic as any rousing Saturday night out in Brighton.

– Raphael Kadushin

2

BRIGHTON

ARTS MECCA

Brighton's free spirit takes centre stage during the 23-day Brighton Festival, the UK's second-largest arts festival (after Edinburgh's). First held in 1967, the annual summer gathering now attracts over 300 000 people for avant-garde art, multimedia exhibitions and musical spectacles. Former guest directors include Anish Kapoor, Brian Eno, Aung San Suu Kyi and actress Vanessa Redgrave.



Dover & Calais

TRAVEL TIME: 80 MINUTES FROM ST PANCRAS STATION, THEN 90-MINUTE FERRY TO CALAIS, FRANCE

With the French ports of Calais and Dunkirk so close to the UK, you could very easily be sitting over sole *meunière* for lunch at a Calais bistro, having tucked into bacon and eggs in London a couple of hours before. It takes just an hour and a half to cross the 34 kilometres of English Channel from Dover (122 kilometres southeast of London) to Calais, with boats departing approximately once an hour.

Links between these international ports have long been strong, forged by the dramatic events of two world wars – most significantly when, in 1940, a massive flotilla of British warships, pleasure boats, fishing boats and private yachts evacuated more than 300 000 soldiers from Dunkirk's beaches. A new exhibition on the evacuation of

Dunkirk opened last year at the secret wartime tunnels at Dover Castle. Dover itself is 'steeped in history', says Jon Iveson, curator of the Dover Museum. The city is home not only to one of the oldest boats in the world, thought to be around 3 550 years old, but also to one of the finest medieval castles in Europe, with the best maintained freestanding Roman lighthouse in the world. 'The forts of the Western Heights are also well worth a visit,' says Iveson, 'forming some of the most impressive fortifications in Britain.'

The best place to stay in Dover is actually about five kilometres outside the town itself (an easy taxi ride from the station). The Marquis at Alkham has six sleek guest rooms and an elegant restaurant that recently earned a rising Michelin star. A night at the Marquis offers the chance to experience the best of modern English cooking before nipping across the Channel to see how contemporary French cuisine compares.

Both Dunkirk and Calais still send out working fishing fleets, and French eateries such as Au Côte d'Argent in Calais and Restaurant L'Estouffade in Dunkirk serve classic seafood dishes that change according to what the boats bring in each morning. When the weather is warm, stock up on pâté, olives and smoked salmon from Dunkirk's Comtesse du Barry and *gâteaux* from Aux Doigts de Jean Bart patisserie, and picnic on the wide golden sands of Malo-les-Bains, the town's six-kilometre stretch of beach. Operation Dynamo War Museum gives further insight into the wartime events that battered this northern French town.

In Calais, don't miss the original 'Burghers of Calais', a famed sculpture by Auguste Rodin located outside the Town Hall, itself a masterpiece of Flemish architecture (in medieval times, Calais and Dunkirk were part of Flanders). On Saturday mornings on the Place d'Armes the air is thick with shouts of market stallholders and tempting smells: great slabs of Brie, hot waffles sizzling on open griddles, roasting coffee. Before boarding the ferry back to Dover, browse main shopping street Rue Royale's *fromageries* and wine and chocolate shops for an edible souvenir.

– Annabelle Thorpe

3

DOVER

CHALK WALK

Long a welcome sight of home for Britons, the White Cliffs of Dover are best experienced by a dramatic clifftop walk. From Dover's Eastern Docks, climb the trail across the chalk grassland for views of the English Channel and the French coast. Follow the trail to South Foreland Lighthouse, used by Marconi for the first international radio transmission. Then, says Dover resident Debbie Dainton, 'Walk down a footpath to Saint Margaret's at Cliffe, a medieval village with a picturesque bay surrounded by the white cliffs.'

JOLLY GOOD SHOW

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT North Laine in Brighton is a maze of vibrant cafés and funky boutiques; Georgian terraced houses in front of the White Cliffs of Dover; Brighton locals claim that Terre à Terre is the best vegetarian restaurant in the country; a quintessentially English beach scene at Brighton Pier

Norwich & Sandringham

TRAVEL TIME: 2 HOURS FROM LIVERPOOL STREET STATION

Two ladies with shopping bags were eyeing the cheese and local Norfolk sausage in Norwich's 900-year-old marketplace when one turned to the other and asked, 'Did you go to Zadie Smith?' They were discussing the best-selling author of *White Teeth*, who'd been in town for one of the twice-yearly literary festivals organised and hosted by the University of East Anglia. As even a first-time visitor will soon discover, Norwich loves writers. This is a place where people actually stop to chat about books and authors. This ancient city in Norfolk has lots of tales to tell and a literary tradition that dates back to the 14th century. It's easy to see why the atmospheric cathedral quarter, with its medieval parish churches, crooked stone buildings and half-timbered Tudor houses, would appeal to a writer. The stories begin to unfold as soon as you hop into one of the City Boats outside Norwich's train station and glide down the River Wensum to the Norwich Cathedral Quarter. One of the most famous writers you've never heard of, Julian of Norwich, wrote her mystical treatise, *Revelations of Divine Love*, while walled up in a cell in St Julian's on Kilderkine Way. In so doing, the 14th-century anchoress became the first known woman to write a book in English.

Visit in July, when the Lord Mayor's Celebration turns Norwich into a citywide carnival and the Shakespeare Festival transforms the cloisters of Norwich's immense Romanesque cathedral into a stage for the Bard's plays. Step inside Dragon Hall, a medieval trading hall with massive oak ceiling beams – a testament to a time when the city was nearly as rich and important as London, thanks to its lucrative wool trade and status as the capital of the pre-Norman kingdom of East Anglia.

Norwich's bookish flavour extends even to its dining and café scenes. The Library Restaurant Bar and Grill, next to the 15th-century Guildhall, serves local favourites in a 19th-century library. Pop in for a piece of cake at the intimate Tea House on Elm Hill, the city's finest medieval street. One of the most popular literary hangouts is the Book Hive, a wonderfully browsable bookstore where author appearances draw adoring crowds.

You probably won't hear any literary gossip at Sandringham, Queen Elizabeth's Norfolk estate 85 kilometres northwest of Norwich. But a visit to the giant Victorian manse set amid woodlands, wetlands and landscaped gardens, open to the public from April to early November, offers glimpses of the rural royal lifestyle enjoyed by four generations of England's monarchs. Sandringham has a famous library where the Queen delivered her first televised Christmas message in 1957, carrying on the tradition of her father, George VI, portrayed by Colin Firth in *The King's Speech*. Strolling through its impeccably grand rooms, memorabilia-filled museum and exquisitely maintained grounds is a very different experience from roaming down the cobbled lanes of lively, lit-loving Norwich. But it's precisely that contrast that makes a visit to this less touristy part of England so appealing.

– Donald Olson

4

NORWICH

MAD FOR MUSTARD

Described as 'a potent symbol of Englishness', Colman's Mustard has been produced in Norfolk for nearly 200 years. Located near Norwich Market, Colman's Mustard Shop and Museum chronicles the rise of Jeremiah Colman's mustard empire. Items on display include wartime mustard tins and art deco pots. You can buy a variety of mustards, along with more unusual products like mustard bath salts or even mustard chocolate.



Birmingham

TRAVEL TIME: 2 HOURS FROM EUSTON STATION

Thirty years ago, Birmingham rarely appeared on travel itineraries. Though it's the biggest metropolis in the Midlands region of England, sitting squarely at the country's geographical heart, the city had seen better days. While the 19th century witnessed Birmingham's emergence as a crucial engine of the Industrial Revolution – a workhorse of factories, forges and provincial wealth – the 20th century brought disaster and decline: German bombs, economic stagnation, rising unemployment. But step off the train into the Birmingham of 2012 and you enter a place that looks like the result of a TV makeover show.

You don't have to search far for evidence of its new image. Opened in 2003, the Selfridges department store has quickly become the city's greatest landmark, with its curves sheathed in 15 000 aluminium discs.

Walk the key nightlife drag of Broad Street and you gain a glimpse of the city's character – warm and defiantly unpretentious – in the bars scattered along this almost one-kilometre-long strip. Risa is a lively, gaudy watering hole that also hosts a comedy club, while Island Bar, nearby on Suffolk Street, is a cocktail bar where the Honey Berry Sour goes down nicely. But there's more to modern Birmingham than party spirit. High culture also holds court. The Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery tells the city's backstory and contains one of the world's top collections of pre-Raphaelite art. The City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, one of Europe's finest classical companies, stirs hearts at Symphony Hall.

In Brindleyplace, an enclave of chic restaurants and shops, Café Ikon serves artisanal teas inside an art gallery. The Mailbox, a former Royal Mail sorting office, is now packed with boutique stores and hotels (including the Birmingham edition of the trendy Malmaison brand). The Jewellery Quarter houses outlets such as Highly Strung, a specialist in crafting dazzlers out of pearls and gemstones.

Head to Bournville, eight kilometres southwest of the city centre, and you trip over Cadbury World, an attraction centred on the famous chocolate producer, which has been based in the city since 1824. Here, you can immerse yourself in all things cocoa via exhibits, tastings and a tour of the packing line.

Over in Balsall Heath, meanwhile, the culinary hot spot is the 'Balti Triangle', a cluster of Indian and Pakistani restaurants (including the much lauded Al Frash) that stands as a symbol of Birmingham's multi-ethnic population. The district even has its own dish, the Balti: a meat curry that, served in a thin steel bowl and eaten with naan bread, was born in the city in the late 1970s.

Amid all this, Birmingham's former life has not been forgotten. The city's heavy-toil heritage has left it with a canal network that runs 56 kilometres. Nowadays, the barges that inch along the photogenic Main Line canal carry weekend cruisers rather than coal and raw metal. But order a pint of beer at the waterside Tap and Spile pub and you can watch the past glide alongside the present all the same.

– Chris Leadbeater

5

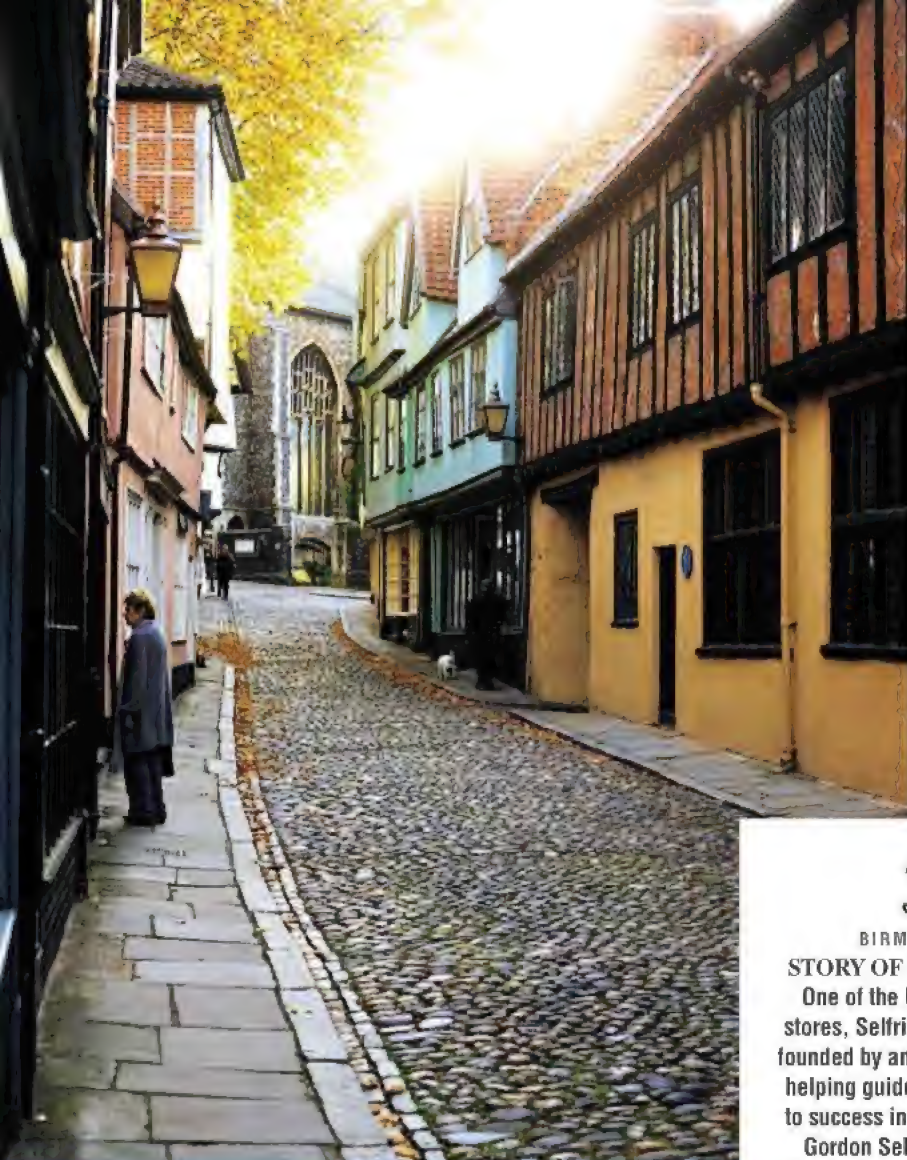
BIRMINGHAM

STORY OF SELFRIDGES

One of the UK's signature stores, Selfridges was in fact founded by an American. After helping guide Marshall Field to success in Chicago, Henry Gordon Selfridge opened Selfridges in London in 1909, drawing crowds by displaying the first monoplane to cross the English Channel. In the same showman spirit, the store's landmark Birmingham branch gets people talking with its curved façade covered with 15 000 anodised aluminium discs mounted on a blue background.

HOT STUFF

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Colman's Mustard, that quintessentially British condiment, has been made in Norfolk for nearly 200 years; Elm Hill is the best-preserved medieval street in Norwich; the eye-catching façade of Selfridges in Birmingham; an inviting reading nook at the Book Hive in Norwich



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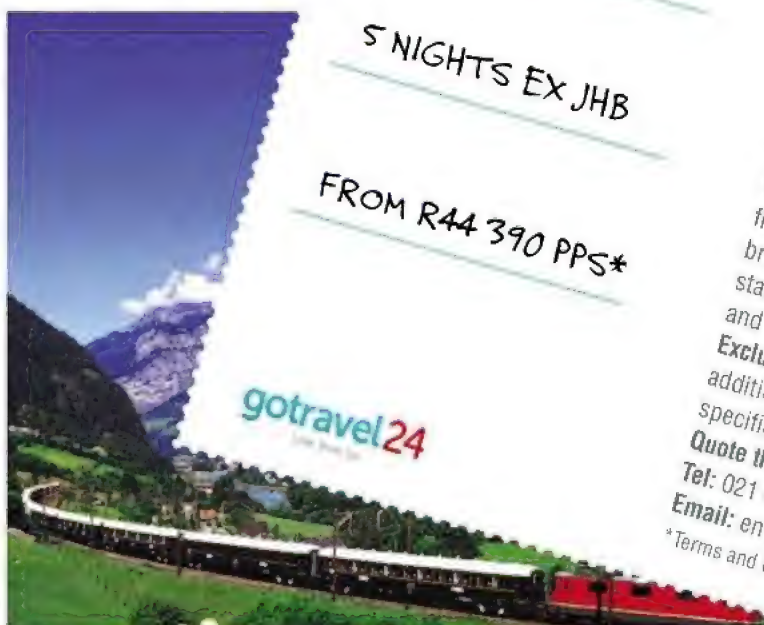
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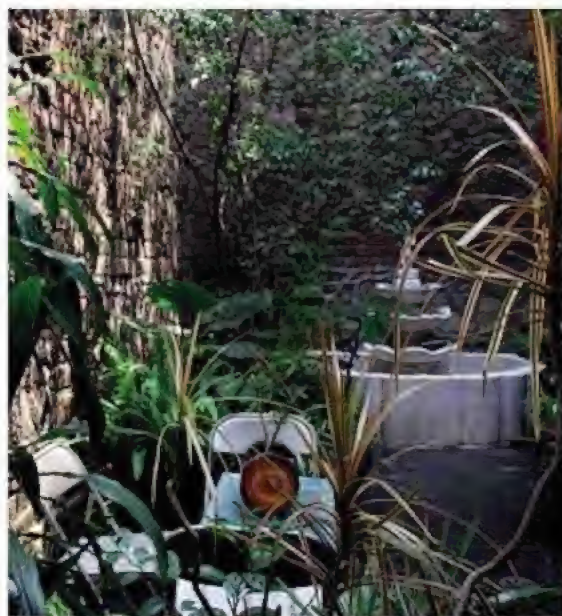
SANCTUARY IN THE SKY
In a modern high-rise block, Distrito Capital's sleek restaurant and bar are set to become one of Mexico City's gastronomic hot spots

VIVA MEXICO CITY

THESE FOUR NEW BOUTIQUE HOTELS PROVIDE A STYLISH BASE TO EXPLORE THE CAPITAL'S MUSEUMS

WORDS JULIA SCHWIETERT

Once the centre of Aztec civilisation, Mexico City is huge – the largest city in North America – with green parks, colonial palaces and more than 150 museums to explore. History and culture (both ancient and modern) dominate, and you'll find the ruins of Aztec temples, the murals of Diego Rivera and the paintings of Frida Kahlo. On Sundays and public holidays, entry to most museums is free for all citizens and often even for foreigners. Pro: the chance to stretch your pesos. Con: bustling crowds and queues at the popular museums. Some, not all, are closed on Mondays.



EL PATIO 77 *San Rafael*

Billed as the city's first green B&B, El Patio 77 is an ambitious addition to the neighbourhood. Partners Alan Vargas and Diego Le Provost renovated their 19th-century *casona* (big house) for 21st-century eco-sensibilities, installing a rainwater catchment system and solar heaters. The inn's furniture is refurbished, and each of the eight guest rooms is named for a Mexican state, decorated with representative art from that region: butterfly mobiles in the Michoacán suite, black ceramic pots in the Oaxacan room. A traditional breakfast is served with fair-trade coffee from Chiapas. The renovated El Chopo University Museum, specialising in experimental work by young artists, and the Monument to the Revolution are both a short walk away. Doubles from R580 including breakfast; www.elpatio77.com

LAS ALCOBAS *Polanco*

What's striking as you enter the calm, cocoonlike rooms of the Yabu Pushelberg-designed Las Alcobas hotel: though it sits on the busiest avenue of the upscale neighbourhood of Polanco, you can't hear the traffic. The double-paned windows are one example of the hotel's spare-no-expense details. Each of the 35 rooms features hand-knotted rugs and original artwork; locally made toiletries include the nopal soap derived from cactus.

Nearby, visit the Soumaya Museum, which houses the vast European and Mexican art collection of billionaire and native son Carlos Slim in a curvaceous new building.

Doubles from R2 900 including breakfast; www.lasalcobas.com



HOTEL BRICK *Roma Norte*

Once a brothel and then a locksmith's storefront, the property that Hotel Brick occupies now welcomes guests with modernist rooms stocked with Assouline coffee-table books, espresso machines and Kiehl's toiletries. Brasserie La Moderna – headed up by chef Richard Sandoval – features raw bar specialties and grilled seafood. The surrounding neighbourhood is charming, with several design boutiques, cafés and contemporary art galleries such as OMR and El 52. Pick up a souvenir in the shop at the Museo del Objeto, a design museum with 30 000 objects – from housewares to toys, some more than 200 years old. Doubles from R2 100; www.hotelbrick.com

DISTRITO CAPITAL *Santa Fe*

Don't be fooled by its exterior: though Distrito Capital occupies a sleek, soaring high-rise in the nouveau riche neighbourhood of Santa Fé, it's still classified as a boutique hotel, occupying just a few floors of the skyscraper. Rooms boast a minimalist design, a black-and-white colour scheme and generous views of the surrounding foothills of two volcanoes. Enjoy the sunset from your bath, then head down to the on-site restaurant and its terrace bar founded by Enrique Olvera, considered one of Mexico City's best young chefs. The menu is ideal for seafood lovers; the four-chilli octopus skewers and tuna tacos are especially delicious.

From R1 430; www.hoteldistritocapital.com



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Umhlanga *Once a holiday village but now part of Durban's bustling*



THE UMHLANGA SANDS

family friendly

WHERE?	A stone's throw from the beach, not far from the centre of Umhlanga village and a five-minute drive to Gateway shopping centre.
WHY GO?	For its direct access to the beach and the promenade, plus panoramic views from the rooms. It's a family-orientated beach resort with entertainment and organised activities for kids. Principally a time-share resort, but hotel rooms can be booked.
VIBE?	Slightly generic (this is a major national franchise), but very friendly and informal. The staff is excellent and very helpful. The resort gets very full during school holidays.
FACILITIES?	Kitchenette with sink, fridge, microwave and kettle. No real living space so families will have to sit together on the bed to watch TV. WiFi only in foyer. Kids' games room, family pub that hosts karaoke evenings, two pools with lawns/astro-turf, mini soccer pitch.
CLIENTELE?	Family holidaymakers. Mostly South African but a few foreign accents too.
EATING & DRINKING?	There are two restaurants, one a Spur and the other bistro style. Both have outdoor eating areas overlooking the ocean, play areas, jungle gyms and child minders. The pub is family orientated. Plus there are many restaurants in the nearby Umhlanga village.
HIGH POINTS?	Going to sleep with the sound of the sea loud in our ears and waking early to watch the sunrise from our bed, and having a very happy child.
LOW POINT?	None.
PRICE?	From R1 200 per room per night (sleeps two adults and two children); www.tsogosunhotels.com/resorts/umhlanga-sands – Iain Sherman



GARDEN COURT UMHLANGA

WHERE?	Just a 20-minute drive from King Shaka Airport and within walking distance of Gateway shopping centre.
WHY GO?	It is conveniently situated, clean and tidy, and the service is excellent.
VIBE?	It is part of a franchise and the decor is pretty generic, but it has quite a relaxed atmosphere.
FACILITIES?	There's a small gym on the fifth floor and a spa that's open from 8am until 6pm. WiFi is not free, which is a bit strange, but you can buy vouchers for access.
CLIENTELE?	Mostly frequented by business travellers, but you'll also find families and visiting sports teams.
EATING & DRINKING?	An in-house bar and restaurant. The restaurant served a buffet dinner when I was there and the food was average but enjoyable. The breakfast buffet has an incredible selection and the fresh orange juice will make your day.
HIGH POINTS?	The superfriendly and efficient service.
LOW POINT?	Having to pay for WiFi, and there's a bit of traffic noise.
PRICE?	Doubles from R1 049 including breakfast; www.tsogosunhotels.com/garden-court/umhlanga – Anja Joubert



THE GATEWAY HOTEL

best value

WHERE?	Located on Umhlanga Ridge, adjacent to the Gateway shopping centre in the heart of the new Umhlanga business precinct.
WHY GO?	For its convenient location for business and for instant retail therapy. It is just a 20-minute drive from King Shaka Airport and is connected to the shopping mall via a walkway. Competitive rates too.
VIBE?	Contemporary buzz, relaxed and unfussy, although lacking in soul.
FACILITIES?	Spacious rooms with very comfortable beds. Laptop safes in the bedrooms and free WiFi in public areas. Conference facilities for up to 600 delegates. Atrium light wells, thermal performance glass and external shading devices are just some of the ecofriendly aspects.
CLIENTELE?	International and local business travellers, conference delegates, eco-conscious travellers and shopaholics in search of retail therapy.
EATING & DRINKING?	A full buffet breakfast is served in the hotel's Fig Tree café – a bistro-style restaurant serving continental cuisine, snack platters and light meals throughout the day. The rooftop pool terrace is a great spot to enjoy a sundowner after work or a hard day's shopping.
HIGH POINTS?	The spacious, well-equipped rooms make it pretty slick for a three-star hotel and an ecofriendly one too. Its convenient location and free underground parking.
LOW POINT?	The paper-thin walls: you can hear everything in the rooms next door. Only the rooms with odd numbers have a decent outlook. The lack of free WiFi in the rooms.
PRICE?	Doubles from R1 440 per night including breakfast; www.thegatewayhotel.co.za – Julia Stadler

new metropolis, Umhlanga has a wide array of hotel offerings. We sample the best



CABANA BEACH LIFESTYLE RESORT

Right on the beach and within easy walking distance of the centre of Umhlanga village, plus it is just a five-minute drive to Gateway shopping centre.

This is a rambling Mediterranean-style self-catering family resort with great views and direct beach and promenade access, plus entertainment and organised activities for kids.

Very friendly and informal, but in need of the refurbish that is planned for 2013. There are restaurants associated with the resort, but no communal lounge or bar areas and the emphasis is firmly on self-catering. The staff is very helpful.

The apartment-style rooms have full kitchen facilities, dining and living area plus sea-view balcony. WiFi only in the lobby. Two pools (one exclusively for adults) with lawns and loungers set in well-established gardens. Fitness centre. Hyacinth macaws and a towel kiosk add charm. Family holidaymakers.

The restaurants are independent from the resort. For dinner we strolled into Umhlanga village, which offers a wide range of dining options (the Thai restaurant was excellent). We had a good breakfast at the resort's Lighthouse Café on the beach promenade overlooking the ocean.

Being lulled to sleep by the sound of the sea and waking early to watch the sunrise from our balcony.

We hope the groovy mosaics in the lift lobbies survive the planned 2013 makeover. The kids' games room was disappointing and the play centre turned out to be a private daycare centre.

From R1 400 per room per night (sleeps two adults and two children); www.tsogosunhotels.com/resorts/cabana-beach – JS



THE OYSTER BOX

Superbly located on the beach opposite the iconic lighthouse in the heart of Umhlanga's golden mile.

splurge

For luxury at its most sublime and a fantastic family vacation – with unparalleled service. Standouts: the hammam treatment at the spa; scrumptious high tea; mouthwatering breakfast (you can even choose champagne and oysters); über-hip Lighthouse Bar.

Unpretentious elegance. You'll find an eclectic mix of well-heeled fashionistas and the old-school glamour set. You may brush shoulders with the occasional celebrity, too.

The magnificent suites are equipped with ice machines, flat-screen TVs and DVD players, and free WiFi. The 20-seat cinema has daily movie screenings. The fabulous kids' club has all the latest in gaming and craft activities, plus unlimited cold drinks, milkshakes, ice creams.

Families, business moguls and international jetsetters looking for a luxe yet homely feel, and intimate wedding parties (it is a superb venue).

A full buffet breakfast is served in the Palm Court restaurant, as are lunches and dinners that extend to the Ocean Terrace too. The elegant Grill Room offers fine dining, while the Lighthouse Bar oozes colonial charm. The Chukka Bar is a quieter spot for a beer.

The sheer luxury of it all, fantastic service and the heated plunge pools complete with loungers that come with the Superior Duplex Garden Villas, and the spa's mind-blowing hammam treatment.

Having to check back into reality once you leave.

Doubles from R4 500 per night for a garden-facing Classic room including breakfast; www.oysterboxhotel.com – JS



THE BEVERLY HILLS HOTEL

On the beach, just five minutes' drive from Gateway shopping centre and 10 minutes' from Durban and the airport.

best for business

For its perfect beachfront location with 180-degree views of the coast. Perfect for a holiday or a stopover if travelling around KwaZulu-Natal. A good option for business travel due to its location and facilities.

Luxurious and well-established although slightly lacking in atmosphere. If you are looking for a quiet, uncluttered experience, you won't be disappointed. Classic decor with a modern twist. Meet-and-greet/check-in was 10 out of 10.

Great for business, it has free WiFi, conference rooms as well as private dining, a boardroom that can accommodate 12 people plus a larger option for up to 50 people. There is a great pool but no spa.

Business travellers and holidaymakers. The open lounge seems to be a meeting place for Durbanites and business people alike.

There are three eating options, from fine dining to relaxed alfresco on the terrace with a view of the sea (my favourite). The breakfast was good.

Being right on the Indian Ocean, as well as the view and the luxuriousness of our Presidential Suite.

No spa.

Doubles from R3 500 including breakfast; www.tsogosunhotels.com/Deluxe/Beverly-Hills-Hotel/ – Jomy Rowe

POSITANO

If John Steinbeck is to be believed, Positano on Italy's Amalfi Coast bites deep. 'It's a dream place that isn't quite real when you're there and becomes beckoningly real after you have gone.' We found great limoncello, dramatic scenery and three great hotels that exude the easy elegance of this seaside town

IL SAN PIETRO DI POSITANO

Where? About five minutes' drive from Positano central. It's almost impossible to see the cliff-top hotel from the shore as the owners have incorporated the surrounding rock formation into the design. The view from the hotel is breathtaking: to the right you have Positano, to your left, the Amalfi coastline. **Why go?** It's a faultlessly luxe experience, from the excellent service to the rooms and beautiful surroundings. Very romantic (only children older than 10 are permitted). **Vibe?** Every room is unique and decorated with incredible style. The atmosphere is relaxed, but it is a five-star hotel with a Michelin-starred restaurant, so a degree of decorum is required. **Facilities?** Room service, private beach, panoramic swimming pool, spa and fitness centre, tennis court with sea views, complimentary yacht cruises, private shuttle for transfers and to take you into town. **Clientele?** Romantic couples, international celebrities and those wanting to experience ultimate luxury without lifting a finger. **Eating and drinking?** Two fantastic restaurants (one on the beach) that serve excellent food and

MAGICAL MED

Experience sheer luxury at Il San Pietro di Positano

drinks. Everything is baked on the premises.

High points? The location is unbelievable and each room is out of this world. Attention to detail and the excellent quality and presentation of everything we ate. **Low point?** None. It cannot be faulted.

Cost? Doubles from R4 250, including breakfast; <http://ilsanpietro.it>

LA FENICE B&B

Where? About 12 minutes' walk from Positano central in the direction of Amalfi. **Why go?** To get away from the bustle of town. Kids are welcome, but take note of stairs leading to the private beach and rooms. There are two wheelchair-friendly rooms and parking is available for R160 a night. Stunning views from the rooms and breakfast terrace. **Vibe?** Very relaxed; it's like living in your own (basic) apartment with a wonderful private veranda leading off each room and magnificent views. **Facilities?** A private beach, but we were there in low season and there were no deck chairs and it was quite dirty. From June to mid October, the private pool is open and the restaurant serves light lunches. There are 21 rooms as well as a villa that you can rent at a weekly rate. Sea-water pool plus Jacuzzi. **Clientele?** From couples to families (with kids over five) who return each year. **Eating and drinking?** They do a lovely breakfast on the terrace overlooking the bay with fresh bread, croissants, jams, fruit, yoghurt and very good coffee. **High point?** The location – close enough to walk to town, but far enough out to get a good night's sleep without any noise. **Low points?** A small bar fridge in each room wouldn't

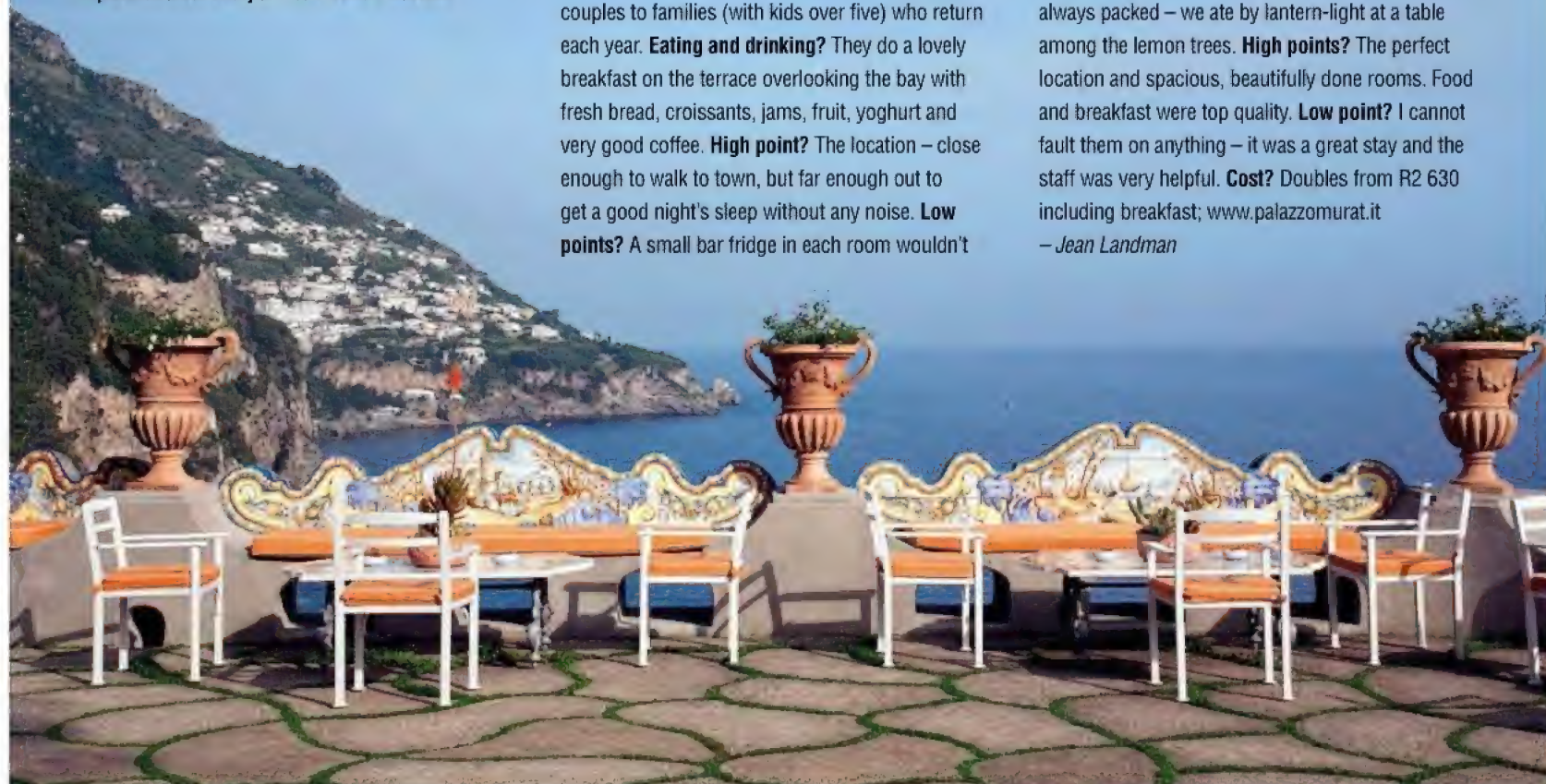
go amiss as the space lends itself to sundowners on your balcony. The towels were threadbare.

Cost? Doubles from R1 570; www.bbfenice.com

HOTEL PALAZZO MURAT

Where? In the heart of Positano within walking distance of all the shops, restaurants and the beach.

Why go? The hotel is beautiful and the rooms are great. Great hotel for families with smaller children as everything is close by and within walking distance. Perfect for couples who want to treat themselves to a bit of luxury accommodation. **Vibe?** The hotel has a colonial feel and is very relaxed, with excellent service. It really feels as though it should be five star. **Facilities?** Built in the style of Vanvitelli with a huge garden courtyard and wonderful restaurant, this is a stunning old hotel with beautiful gardens. Free shuttle service. A swimming pool is under construction. **Clientele?** A wide variety, from honeymoon couples, families and groups to singletons. **Eating and drinking?** Stocked bar fridge. Room service offers a great choice. The breakfast in the courtyard is out of this world and all pastries and breads are freshly baked on the premises. At night, the very romantic restaurant in the courtyard was always packed – we ate by lantern-light at a table among the lemon trees. **High points?** The perfect location and spacious, beautifully done rooms. Food and breakfast were top quality. **Low point?** I cannot fault them on anything – it was a great stay and the staff was very helpful. **Cost?** Doubles from R2 630 including breakfast; www.palazzomurat.it
— Jean Landman





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This sleek, compact digital camera combines intuitive use with advanced features. With a new 16-megapixel EXR-CMOS sensor, FUJINON 15x super-wide-angle lens (24–360mm equivalent) and 3.0-inch, high-contrast 460K resolution LCD, with 160-degree viewing, this camera is the perfect travel companion.

GEIGERRIG HYDRATION PACK

Perfect for hikers and outdoor enthusiasts, the Geigerrig hydration pack has an OGWA-powered hydration bladder, so all you need to do is to bite down for a refreshing drink; the Geigerrig pressurised system does the rest. Available in citrus, blue and assorted colours.



BUILT CARGO TRAVEL ORGANISER

Perfect for transporting electronic accessories, this travel organiser stretches to fit a wide range of accessories and gadgets, including chargers, cord adaptors, iPods, hard drives and smartphones.



EVA DUFFEL TROLLEY BAG WITH POCKETS

This Ballistic nylon duffel bag (39x71x33cm) with wheels is ideal for easy transport and handling.

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TIME OUT

THIS PAGE Relaxing on the deck of a restored *dahabiyya* – a wooden vessel favoured by 19th-century aristocrats – is one of the most enchanting ways to experience the Nile River

OPPOSITE Take a camel ride for a time-honoured approach to the Pyramids of Giza

EGYPT'S NEW DAY

*Memories of young love – of a woman and
of an exotic Egypt – prompt **Carl Hoffman**
to return to the realm of the pharaohs at
a time of uncertainty and much promise*



Protesters jamming Cairo's Tahrir Square filled my TV screen in January last year. Night after night I watched them demonstrate, a sight that excavated something deep in me, like hearing the song of an old love.

I remembered stepping out of Cairo's airport and inhaling an unfamiliar smell, acrid and sweet, of smoke, dust, a hint of rotting fruit mixed with car exhaust. I remembered a darkness barely illuminated by too few streetlights, a bus without window glass rattling and spewing grey smoke. I remembered a charming man with decaying teeth insisting the hotel to which my girlfriend and I were headed was closed.

In downtown Cairo, people crowded the streets. I remembered haze and broken curbs and feral cats and exhaustion and nowhere to sleep, touts and hustlers leering at every turn, a world more jumbled and frenetic and wild than any I had ever witnessed. By the time we found a room, my nerves were so jangled that I crawled into my sleeping bag rather than the bed, stuffing my camera and valuables in with me.

Morning light always brings reassurance. Quickly we found a ramshackle but friendly hotel off Tahrir Square. I left fear behind and dragged my girlfriend to the camel market and on packed buses. In Luxor we spent hours on the banks of the Nile River negotiating with a felucca captain, not for a normal three-hour sail but a five-day voyage to Aswan, a journey of beauty and meals of Nile fish and tomatoes – five nights under stars blinking over what seemed to me the most scenic river in the world. I have never fallen in love with a place like I did then with the land of Egypt. I felt free there, inspired, passionate, invigorated, unleashed.

The year was 1984. I was 24 years old and reading Alan Moorehead's histories of the Nile and TE Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, and I had this vague idea of the world and maybe what I wanted to do in it, make of it. I also was in love, with a woman who had eyes the colour of the sea and had already seen much of the world, while I'd seen none.

Those two weeks in Egypt – I suddenly realised this last year while watching men and women wave flags in Tahrir Square – defined my life from that moment forth. They made me want to plunge into the world – not the normal parts, but the gritty corners. I wanted to write about them, describe them, bring people to them. A few months afterward I sold my first story, about that felucca trip, to a newspaper. I married the sea-eyed girl. Later I would travel the globe for magazine assignments: Greenland, Afghanistan, Congo – 65 countries. And I'd write a book about an 80 000-kilometre journey around the world. Every kilometre was, in a way, a quest to feel that feeling I had in Tahrir Square and on the banks of the Nile in 1984.

Strangely, I had never returned to Egypt. But as Hosni Mubarak clung to power and Cairo's streets filled with protest, I was seized by a strong desire to return, to see the place that had meant so much to me. The original love – and marriage – was gone and so, suddenly, recently, was a relationship that had come after it, that had promised much. The timing seemed ripe. I wondered: would Egypt still hold romance? Had it really changed? Had I?

By the time I arrive in Cairo, President Mubarak is gone. I get there, in fact, for the first massive post-revolution celebration. The

city is ecstatic, almost drunk with a new empowerment. Tahrir Square is unrecognisable with its ocean of people, their faces painted with Egyptian flags, talking, singing, dancing, selling tea, arguing.

I remembered on my first trip feeling overwhelmed by the curiosity and hospitality of the Egyptians. Part of it, I knew, was a hustle (there was always a papyrus scroll to be sold or a tour to be guided along), but a good part of it was sincere – and still is, I learn as I wade into crowded Tahrir Square. A circle rather than a square, Tahrir sits inside the normally crushing traffic of a vast intersection that is surrounded by highway overpasses and a jumble of apartment buildings, government bureaucracies and the pink-hued Museum of Egyptian Antiquities. The protests have rerouted traffic, transforming the circle and nearby streets into something altogether different. People are literally everywhere, on street signs, on lamp posts, posing for photos atop tanks. Men give me their hands, others take my legs and haul me onto a construction trailer for a better view. Everyone talks, because that is how Egyptians are. Now they're even more exuberant with their new love.

'This is freedom!' Amir, a 20-year-old student, declares. He has been on and off the square every day since the revolution started. Fishing in his pockets, he brings out a crumpled piece of paper stained with red blotches. 'A man was running with me when snipers on the roofs shot him. I picked him up and tried to run to the hospital with him, but he died. I keep this paper for my children so they will see what we did.'

Prayers for the dead are being offered from a stage, encouraging thousands of men and women to kneel and bow in the warm Cairo sun; others remain standing, holding up wooden crosses. Strangers thrust cups of sweet tea into my hand, and a man introduces me to his five daughters and wife. 'Ask them what they think of Mubarak!' he says. Into the night it goes: bottle rockets zoom, the pops of firecrackers thump my chest and I'm struck by joy and a little sadness. I'd been so young in Egypt! It was all possibility then: life and the world stretched open before me, nothing known, all innocence. But the world moves through us and we move through it and nothing stops. Egypt had inspired me and travel had given me a life. Now both had brought me back to witness the birth of something so big it was changing history across the Middle East. Seemingly the only tourist in Cairo, I'm asked by everyone where I'm from and what I think of their revolution. In no time I'm hooked all over again.

The next morning I break away from Tahrir to head to Giza and the pyramids, those great piles of mystical stone that rise in a sea of apartment buildings, a sprawl that surrounds them more closely than in 1984. No matter how clichéd the pyramids may be, they hit with a punch: they are so fantastical and immense that they seem a Disney invention, an unreal perfection of giant blocks pointing toward the sky. They say so much about the human yearning to create and build.

With the absence of other tourists, I essentially have the place to myself. Only soldiers and idle horse and camel touts are present, the

CAIRO COOL

Tiny cafés are part of the tapestry that makes up downtown Cairo, where smoking a *shisha* is still very much part of daily life





ENDURING GRANDEUR
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT This statue of Ramses II is among the ruins of the Karnak temple complex near Luxor, one of the largest ancient religious sites in the world; a delicious lunch of grilled aubergine, falafel, pickled lemons and rocket aboard the *dahabiyya*; a tourist bus in the Valley of the Kings, the royal cemetery for 62 pharaohs located on the west bank at Luxor; intricately carved columns at Karnak; hire bicycles for the day and cycle from the Valley of the Kings to the Valley of the Queens; a boat outside the Temple of Isis





touts' urgent pitches transformed by the dearth of visitors into simple conversation. At the mention of Mubarak and the revolution they fall silent. Then it pours out: the touts were among the men who charged through the throngs of protesters on Tahrir Square on 2 February, wielding riding whips, clubs and knives.

'I did not like Mubarak, but I have no work and cannot feed my family,' a camel tout who would only give his name as Hussein says. 'I have had to sell two camels.' This work is all they know, all they do – the sons of camel touts who were themselves sons of camel touts. Lately, they say, there had been talk of cleaning up the pyramids and eliminating touts, replacing them with a train. 'A man told us that if we went to the square to support Mubarak,' Hussein continues, 'they would cancel the plan.' About 70 of them rode into the mayhem on horses and camels. Though video suggests otherwise, the men insist they did not mean to attack anyone. 'We know nothing about politics; this man tricked us with his way of talking. We would never hurt anyone!'

Later, wandering the crooked, potholed streets of the nearby Nazlet el-Samman neighbourhood, I'm hit again by the Egypt I remember: donkey carts, men wearing djellabas while leading camels – a world of dust and noise and crowds and bright colours against brown desert. This time, though, I also see its less romantic side, including the thousands of people squished into tight living quarters. Though there is intense life here, a dynamic free-for-all of smells and people and animals and traffic long gone from much of the more affluent world, the conditions seem out of place in the 21st century.

From Giza I make my way to the other side of Cairo and to Qarafa, the City of the Dead, where I find Abdul Aziz Sahel sitting amid the deceased. Cairo, a city of ten million, is all cacophony and motion, but on the streets of Qarafa you can hear the birds gossip. The twisting dirt alleys go on and on, narrow between walls of mausoleums where thousands of souls lie buried, a necropolis more than 700 years old. Sipping a glass of sweet, hot tea, Sahel invites me to visit with him. 'I have lived here for 85 years and my family for 350,' he says, sitting alone at a table. 'Mubarak was a good man; it was the people under him who were bad. He should have stayed until elections in six months and then left with dignity.' A pause, then silence, which I don't want to interrupt. 'It is good for an old person to live among the dead,' he says. 'The dead don't talk or make trouble.'

There is a photo of me in 1984 taken on the banks of the Nile in Aswan. As much as I'd loved Cairo, it had been southern Egypt and the Nile that had burned deepest. I think about that old photo as the train from Cairo rattles south through the night. The Luxor and Aswan of my memory are villages along a river shore lined with palm trees and mud walls. Women wash clothing in the river's shallows; camels and donkeys and fishermen go about their daily chores. The great Nile flows through, dotted with lateen-rigged sailboats. These were places of pure romance that I wanted to dig into and wrap around myself.

At some point I fall asleep; when I wake, I'm in Luxor. I don't recognise it. Time hasn't been kind to this ancient settlement. The Nile River here is now edged with trinket shops and concrete. Dozens of cruise ships sit docked, blocking the river view. I see a Club Med and resort hotels. This is no longer a village; it's a city

*'We tie up to a tree overhanging water
so clear that I can see the bottom of
the Nile – and do nothing but listen to
the river's trickle. The boatmen speak
in whispers: it's that kind of place.
There is nothing more to want,
to ask for'*

A WORLD APART

THIS PAGE Casting off at the start
of a magical *dahabiyya* journey
on the Nile River from Esna,
south of Luxor

OPPOSITE Most of the city of
Aswan in the south of Egypt lies
on the east bank of the Nile



built around mass tourism. Weirdest of all in such a tourism-centred place: there aren't any tourists. Not one.

I head across the Nile by boat. Other than the sprawling ruins of the imposing Karnak Temple complex, Luxor's great historic sites, including the once secret pharaonic tombs of the Valley of the Kings, lie in the desert on the western side. I step off the boat into a community that reminds me of the old Luxor – a handful of open-air cafés and restaurants lining a dirt street along the river, calm, quiet. I sit at a café to smoke a sweet *shisha* and drink a cold, pink *karkadeh* made with hibiscus blossoms from the river's edge. Lizards skitter. The water glimmers. Ibis stand in the current. An Egyptian is the only other customer, smoking at the next table.

'For 20 days we protected the tombs,' says Omar Ahmed Hohamed. 'When the police abandoned them, people tried to loot them. Tourism is our business; we must protect our monuments.' Hohamed owns a restaurant; like many in Luxor, he depends on the tourism industry. 'At the moment I have no business. But things will get better because now we are free and visitors will come back.'

Hohamed has a friend who drives a taxi; soon I'm plunging beyond the river's green banks into a world of rock and desert. We're going to the Valley of the Kings. The first wondrous thing about this monumental complex, which I didn't visit in 1984, is where it was built: in a hard, forbidding valley of stone, a stark, hot place even in early spring. Despite its remote setting, the valley is visited by as many as 20 000 tourists on weekends in high season. The entrance is a vast parking lot. When I roll in, it's empty. Travelling in Egypt during this ongoing revolution of 2011 is turning out to be revolutionary in itself; I have Egypt's greatest and most visited sites to myself. As impressive as the pyramids were, the tombs here, dating back more than 3 000 years, overwhelm me; they seem inconceivable. To chisel hundreds of metres into solid rock, to adorn the chiselled walls with detailed paintings of crocodiles and cobras and fish, then to carve out vast underground chambers with perfectly angled corners in which to place enormous sarcophagi with nary a supporting beam. I'm struck by the sophistication and complexity of the human imagination.

My final stop is Aswan, where we'd finished our five-day felucca journey all those years ago. Aswan, too, is deserted, the tourists scared away by a revolution that has barely touched this town. The Nile narrows here, as does the corridor of green fields along its banks; on the west side, the green is a mere 100 metres wide before running into

sudden mountains of sand and rock, which are topped with centuries-old rock tombs. For three days I stay in Aswan. I take the local ferry, packed with veiled women and moustached men. Then I befriend a group of men and join them on a motorboat for a ride south. We glide by a cataract and into a world of small islands and channels fringed with reeds. Kingfishers dive. Herons stalk prey in the shallows. The channels grow narrower. We tie up to a tree overhanging water so clear that I can see the bottom – and do nothing but listen to the river's trickle. The boatmen speak in whispers: it's that kind of place. There is nothing more to want, to ask for.

We cruise farther along the Nile and meet up with two other boats, which tie up alongside, and soon there are seven of us men eating grilled Nile fish dusted with rocks of salt and accompanied by lemon slices and tomatoes and tahini and hot flat bread. A breeze wafts by as we drift with the current. One of the men spots fishing boats beached on a bank. We motor over. The fishermen, in torn T-shirts and surrounded by nets, are cooking over a fire. Moments later glasses of smoky-tasting tea are in our hands. With the tea, talk turns to the revolution. 'We say one hand clapping makes no sound, but many together are loud,' says one of my new friends in a poetic articulation of the protests.

That night I go to sleep on a train travelling back to Cairo. The next day is Friday, the start of the Egyptian weekend, and Tahrir Square is thronged again with celebrants. Mubarak is gone, but the effects of the revolution won't be known for a good while. Still, everyone conveys an optimism, an innocence. Egyptians are seized with the possibilities – not all that different from my own self in Egypt 27 years before.

Being on the Nile in Egypt again has enthralled me. But it is having unintended consequences. Places do that; ghosts inhabit them. Memories and feelings I had forgotten were surging back in a sudden resurrection, pushing me toward that first love – and making me conscious of time, time passing and times lost. I was realising that I couldn't be in Egypt without feeling sadness. Not that that was a bad thing: travel is all about making us feel things we don't feel at home. Late that night I would write my ex a long letter, and soon we would be friends again for the first time in years.

In Tahrir Square I encounter a politically active physician, Adel Nada. Standing in the crowd, he observes, 'History tells us that you cannot go back; you can never cross the same water twice. The river keeps flowing; each time you enter it you swim in different water.' From what I've experienced, he has it about right.

GETTING THERE Non-stop flight For a non-stop option from Joburg to Cairo, book with SAA, R6 723 return, or Egypt Air, R6 787 return (codeshare details on www.kayak.com). **Best price** If you're willing to stop over, Qatar and Emirates both offer excellent fares, from R5 517 to R5 777 from Joburg to Cairo return, but total travel time is from 13¾ hours to 24 hours. Ticket prices are higher in December.



HELP SAVE THE 'WOW'

These giants of the animal kingdom need help. Despite their strength and cunning they're no match for a poacher's rifle. For 50 years WWF has been securing protected areas worldwide, but these aren't enough to stop the killing. To disrupt the sophisticated criminal gangs supplying animal parts to lucrative illegal markets, we are working with governments to toughen law enforcement. We're also working with consumers to reduce the demand for unlawful wildlife products. Help us look after the world where you live at www.wwf.org.za



Black Rhinoceros,
Nairobi National Park, Kenya.

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the best short trips in the world

LONG WEEKEND

A SPOT OF CROQUET
While away the time
at Port Elizabeth's
Hacklewood Hill Country
House by playing a
few rounds of croquet
– terribly sophisticated



BUSH, BEACH AND BEYOND

**SPEND A FEW DAYS DISCOVERING WHAT LIES BEYOND THE OBVIOUS
IN THE EASTERN CAPE**

WORDS BRIDGET MCNULTY PHOTOGRAPHS MARK PEDDLE

WHEN YOU DRIVE OUT OF PORT ELIZABETH, the first thing you notice is the green. Not the fynbos green of the Western Cape or the lush green of KwaZulu-Natal ... not even the sun-bleached green of Gauteng. This landscape is verdant. The bushveld, rolling hills and grasslands speak to the floods of 2011, which have made this year's vista rich and abundant, with fruit and flowers on almost every tree. It was the first of many surprises the Eastern Cape held in store for us. I imagined goats, dusty streets, one or two nice beaches. I got wildlife, tree-lined avenues and some of the most gasp-worthy ocean views I've seen in years.

Msenge Bush Lodge

Msenge Bush Lodge, our first stop and one of two game lodges within the Pumba Private Game Reserve, is all about the view. Walls made of glass have only the carved-wood door frames to break the uninterrupted sightlines of bush and watering hole. With all of the Big Five as well as hippo, hyena, cheetah, wild dog and the only 'free range' white lions in South Africa calling Pumba home, the chances of seeing something exciting at this watering hole are good. We had just poured ourselves a cup of tea on the veranda when an elephant decided to come down to the watering hole for a drink... less than 100 metres from our bedroom. Just us, and the elephant. Later in the day, just us and the herd of elephant – a total of nine, including three babies, who decided to pop down for a drink as we were finishing lunch, joined by a pair of friendly giraffe. This time we were even closer, not 50 metres away on the swimming pool deck that laps the bush, unfenced.

And this is what makes Msenge so special: the lines between bush and lodge don't exist – you are staying in the bush, with all the wild animals. Of course, there are other things that make this such a lovely place to spend a few days – the attention to detail is impeccable. But when I think of Msenge, I'll think of following a family of white lions through the reserve as the sun sets. Wild life, up close.

Pumba Water Lodge

If you prefer gazing out over a lake, then 20 minutes away from Msenge you'll find her sister – Pumba Water Lodge. Like Msenge, Water Lodge is unfenced, which means up-close-and-personal encounters with game are not only likely but inevitable. So inevitable that you have to be escorted to and from your room at night because the resident hippo like to roam, and the hyena have developed a fondness for the footpaths. The lodge itself has stunning views



over the lake, with plenty of comfy spaces to sip a sundowner or hot chocolate – the cosy lounge, the bar with a view or (prime hippo-spotting area) the couch-covered deck. The other speciality at Pumba Water Lodge is the bush bar and jetty, floating on top of the water, the ideal place for a private breakfast or lunch. While away a few hours over a relaxed lunch, with no sounds save the calling of birds and the occasional grunt of a hippo.

Our last morning in the bush, we went on a fascinating game walk with ranger Pieter Dunn, an experience I would highly recommend to anyone wanting to get a completely different perspective of the bush. Being able to examine tracks and spoor, taste indigenous plants and termites (oh yes) and get a much more personal interaction with the game was an extraordinary way to start the day.

Hacklewood Hill Country House

The thing nobody ever mentions about holidays on game reserves is that they're exhausting. Exhausting in the best possible way, yes, but between the early morning game drives and the late nights sitting around the fire, there's really not a lot of down time. Which is why our next stop, at Hacklewood Hill Country House in Port Elizabeth, was so beautifully timed.

Only an hour from Pumba, this charming Victorian manor house set in a lush garden is the epitome of relaxation. Antiques lovers will think they've died and

gone to opulent heaven – each of the eight rooms is individually decorated with antique furnishings and vintage decor. A visit to Hacklewood Hill feels like a visit to your favourite aunt's country manor. If your favourite aunt happens to have a superb staff complement to whip up mouthwatering meals at every turn, that is. Food is a highlight at Hacklewood Hill. That's partly because the house is set up for cosy, intimate dining, but also because there's really not that much else to do. What a treat!

After the excitement of the game reserve, it's a relief to have hours off to walk around the garden, find a spot to read in the lounge, soak up the sun on our garden-view balcony or get a little more active with a game of tennis or croquet. This haven of tranquillity had us rested, refreshed and ready for the next adventure.

The Sands at St Francis

An hour out of Port Elizabeth lies the Pleasantville town of St Francis Bay, where all the houses are white and thatched, and the views from every angle are spectacular. The Sands luxe beach house epitomises comfortable chic, with the emphasis on providing the perfect backdrop to enjoy the beautiful surroundings.

Here you can happily spend the whole afternoon on your private deck overlooking the ocean, then stroll down to the beach for a walk or swim before returning, sun-soaked and sandy-footed, to your luxurious suite to wash off the sand and clean up (a little) for dinner.

Deliciously fresh meals are served in the restaurant. There's a small but well-stocked wine cellar, a great fishing spot directly in front of The Sands, and all manner of excursions – from nature trails to nearby Cape St Francis to deep-sea fishing trips or cycling.

We saw only a small slice of the Eastern Cape – but it was more than we'd normally experience; it extended beyond the obvious. The overwhelming sense I was left with was: I want more.

EAT

Ginger at The Beach Hotel on Port Elizabeth's beachfront offers delicious lunches and dinners with a twist – highly recommended; www.ginger-restaurant.co.za.

Msenge Bush Lodge and **Pumba Water Lodge** offer full-board including drinks. **Hacklewood Hill** and **The Sands** each serve three meals a day, à la carte.

SLEEP

Msenge Bush Lodge R5 720 per person sharing per night, including all food, drinks and game drives; www.pumbagamereserve.co.za.

Pumba Water Lodge R5 720 per person sharing per night, including all food, drinks and game drives; www.pumbagamereserve.co.za.

Hacklewood Hill Country House R950 per person sharing per night; www.hacklewood.co.za.

The Sands at St Francis R1 720 per double room; www.thesands.co.za.

SHORE THING

THIS PAGE Endless beach views at St Francis Bay

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Hacklewood Hill feels straight out of a storybook; Msenge Bush Lodge offers decks on the edge of the wild; the only free-ranging white lions in South Africa at Pumba Private Game Reserve



great escapes *Three perfect getaways in KwaZulu-Natal*



PHINDA MOUNTAIN LODGE

WHERE? Up the north coast, 3½ hours' drive from Durban.
WHY GO? Because within the 23 000 hectares of bushveld there are seven habitats with six lodges – from Mountain, Forest, Vlei, Rock and Zuka to The Homestead Lodge – built to match the varying terrain.

VIBE? Exclusive accommodation in a wilderness sanctuary.

CLIENTELE? Lots of foreign accents, with local conference groups and honeymooners.

EATING & DRINKING? Pan-African cuisine with fantastic breakfasts. Phinda prides itself on its candlelit dinners in unexpected settings, such as the boma when we were there.

GOOD ROOMS? Our family suite was super-spacious with a family lounge flanked by two identical queen-size rooms, each with an extra single bed. It was also ultra-private and very close to the pool.

HIGH POINTS? The wildlife! From the family of warthogs living underneath our deck that had our children enthralled to the near-tame monkeys and buck that surrounded our suite.

LOW POINT? That we didn't have enough time to see any of the other lodges.

PRICE? From R3 995 per person per night. Take advantage of the current special offer: stay for four nights and pay for only three.

VALUE FOR MONEY? Definitely, for the feeling of privacy and pampering you get when you're there.

HOW DO YOU GET THERE? You can fly from Joburg to Richards Bay; it's a two-hour drive from there to the lodge. Or drive from Durban.

CONTACT? www.andbeyondafrica.com

– Kerry Fischer



CHAMPAGNE CASTLE

Central Drakensberg, right beneath Cathkin Peak. For the peaceful mountain setting, dramatic views, beautiful surroundings and unsurpassed walking and other adventure activities (unaffiliated helicopter flips are a must).

Old-school, full-board family hotel.

From young families to retirees to international tourists.

Three large meals and two tea treats come standard. It is buffet-style dining, plus there's a good old-fashioned bar.

Rooms are large and comfortable, with a balcony. The towels and linen are average. Most rooms enjoy spectacular views.

The setting and serenity. And Champagne Castle is extremely relaxing.

No low point but the sheer amount of food was intimidating! A little more attention to detail in the rooms wouldn't go amiss.

R1 100 per person, including all meals and teas. It's worth looking out for specials.

Certainly.

Fly to Durban and drive to the Berg: it's approximately 2½ hours' from King Shaka Airport to Champagne Castle Hotel.

www.champagnecastle.co.za

– Kristen Tremmer



KARKLOOF HOTEL & SPA

Just 1½ hours' drive from Durban.

It's a five-star establishment set within 3 500 hectares of private reserve that sets an exacting international benchmark for how hotels should be run, with an incredible spa.

Down-to-earth, personal hospitality with spacious interiors and sumptuous suites.

Foreigners and lone travellers looking for some time out.

A raw-food menu is available alongside an à la carte menu that dishes up delicious dishes like roasted warthog from the property prepared in the hotel's own butchery.

All 16 double villas are huge and set into the landscape, with massive decks on which to snooze, read and relax. Super-comfy beds.

My suite's resident hornbill in the tree outside my front door, plus the flexibility afforded to me as a single female traveller.

That I probably will never be able to afford to go there again.

From R9 000 per person per night, including all meals, spa treatments, full wine cellar (excluding French champagne) and transfers from Durban.

Yes – if you consider the level of accommodation and hospitality on offer, coupled with attention to detail and flexibility, not to mention the excellent food and impeccable spa. I cannot recommend Karkloof enough.

You can drive from Durban (101km) or Johannesburg (527km) or fly to Durban as transfers to the lodge are included in the price.

www.karkloofspa.com

– KF

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The towns ITALY forgot

AS MODERN TIMES PASS THEM BY,
ITALY'S AGELESS HILL TOWNS TURN TO
ALBERGO DIFFUSO, A GAME-CHANGING HOTEL
CONCEPT TO SURVIVE. MIRIAM MURPHY
EXPERIENCES ITS MAGIC



ROCK STAR

THIS PAGE The cave dwellings in Matera that form Le Grotte della Civita have been faithfully restored using local architectural materials and minimalist new design elements only where absolutely necessary
OPPOSITE The Church of Our Lady of the Lake in Santo Stefano di Sessanio, one of the villages that have adopted the *albergo diffuso* concept

I awaken on a high bed plush with pillows and antique linens.

Rays of sunlight filter through a grated window, casting a honeyed glow on the room's curved, rough-hewn walls and high ceiling. An old wood table topped with a white cloth runner is laid with fresh fruit and a bottle of wine. Candles shimmer by an oval bathtub set on a rough stone floor in an adjoining space – a space that looks for all the world like a cave.

Momentarily disoriented, I soon realise that I'm in the hotel in the ancient town of Matera that I'd checked into under cover of darkness the night before. The town, which lies east of Naples in Italy's southern region of Basilicata, is a jumble of small dwellings fashioned out of cream-coloured tuff stone. Layered one atop another like small boulders, or *sassi*, and incorporating natural caves, the dwellings hopscotch the flanks of a butte. The effect when I saw it the preceding evening was both of disarray and harmony, individuality and unity. Then I'd come upon a gate at the foot of this curious little citadel: the entrance to Sextantio Le Grotte della Civita, the one-of-a-kind hotel that recast grotto quarters into some of Europe's more unusual accommodations – and my base for a few days.

I'd been hearing about these troglodyte habitations in the mysterious land nicknamed 'Sassi' (for its rock formations) since I moved to Rome more than three decades ago. Prehistoric settlers created these half-cave, half-hovel dwellings, thought to represent some of the earliest housing in Italy, out of the soft volcanic stone that forms many of southern Italy's hill towns. Inhabited for millennia, the caves required little in the way of upkeep, were cool in summer and could accommodate livestock, making them expedient as basic shelter. It was only after author Carlo Levi – exiled to this remote land in the 1930s by the Fascists – wrote about the unhygienic living conditions in his scathing 1945 exposé, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, that the dwellings became a national scandal. 'Christ never came this far,' Levi wrote, 'nor did time, nor the individual soul, nor hope...' To address the humiliation, the Italian government began evacuating the caves in the 1950s, moving almost 20 000 people to public housing in the newer section of Matera.

The honeycomb of forsaken homes sat empty (with the exception of the occasional squatter) until a new vision for this extraordinary townscape, and similarly faltering hill towns, began to take hold in the 1980s, followed by the emergence of the *albergo diffuso*, or dispersed hotel, movement, a trend toward authentic, locally sourced lodging that has breathed new life into, and sometimes even resuscitated, old villages.

'The *albergo diffuso* is an Italian model for development born to save uninhabited houses in the rising numbers of small Italian *borghi*, or villages, vacated as people moved to cities,' said Giancarlo Dall'Ara, the visionary behind the concept, when we'd talked before my visit to Matera. 'It's a situation that exists in hundreds of abandoned villages around Italy.'

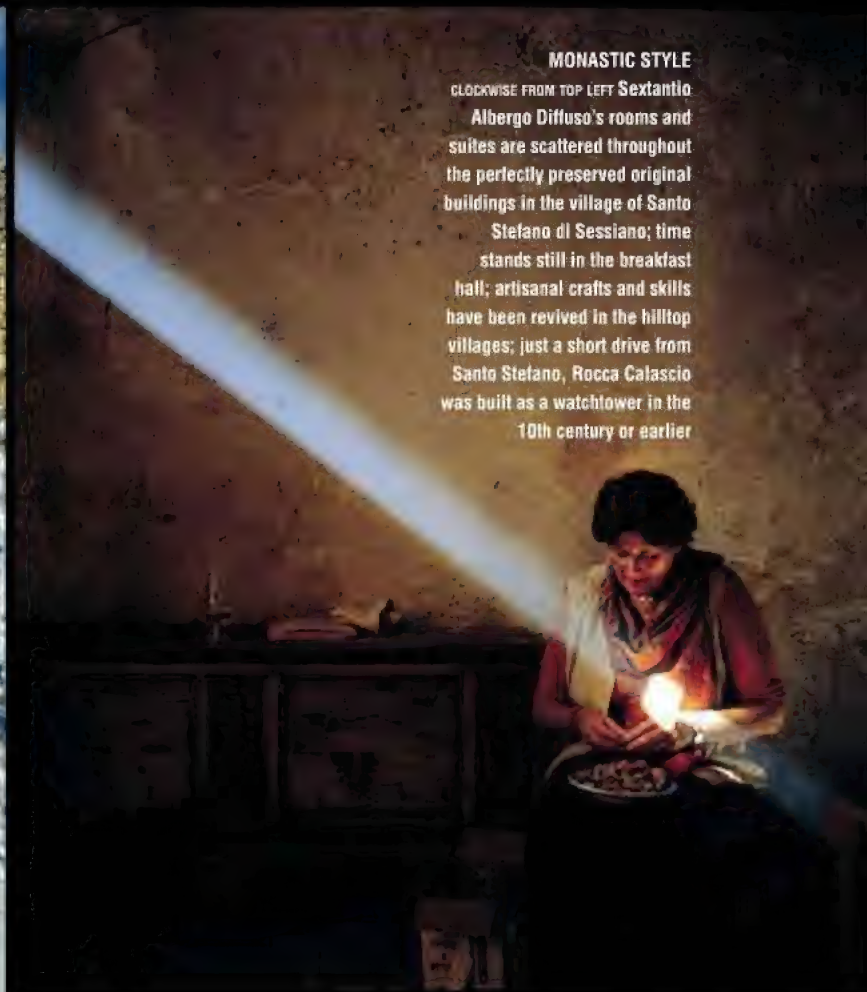
Dall'Ara's innovation: remake the villages into a sort of rambling guest lodge with a central management that offers hotel amenities like maid service, a restaurant and concierges. Visitors become part of the community – even, at times, the community. 'For people who don't really like to stay in hotels, this is an ideal alternative,' he noted. Also key: retain as many authentically local touches as possible for a strong sense of place.

It would be difficult to get more authentic than the Grotte della Civita (Caves of the Town) hotel. As I survey my room in the morning sun, it becomes clear that the work here was more conservation than restoration. White linens from antique trousseaux have been repurposed as bed covers and runners; side tables have been fashioned from centuries-old grain chests. The chair is a milking stool, the bathroom basin an animal trough. Antique washboards serve as soap dishes, a carpenter's bench as a dressing table. A brazier once heaped with coal to warm the cave now holds bath accessories, including antique liqueur decanters filled with shampoo and soap gel, and a cluster of candles. Huge copper pots for heating milk in the fireplace now serve as wastebaskets or containers for yet more candles.

ON TOP OF THE WORLD

THIS PAGE Original terracotta pantile rooftop in Santo Stefano di Sessanio, a medieval hill town in Italy's Gran Sasso e Monti della Laga National Park in the highest region of the Apennines





MONASTIC STYLE

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Sextantio Albergo Diffuso's rooms and suites are scattered throughout the perfectly preserved original buildings in the village of Santo Stefano di Sessiano; time stands still in the breakfast hall; artisanal crafts and skills have been revived in the hilltop villages; just a short drive from Santo Stefano, Rocca Calascio was built as a watchtower in the 10th century or earlier

'I scoured flea markets and bric-à-brac dealers for original pieces used by labourers and farmers,' says Margareta Berg, the blond, fresh-faced co-owner of the hotel, when we meet for a morning cappuccino. And the glass for the few windows and doors, rippled as though antique? 'It wasn't easy to find someone who knew the old glassblowing techniques,' she admits.

Berg tells me that the renovations purposely preserved the shapes of the grottoes and the absence of decoration. The simple, sculptural presence of the stone walls provides visual drama, enhanced only by recessed lights and banks of flickering candles that create an almost churchlike glow. Floors, which were mostly dirt, were paved with antique tiles and rock from the nearby Murgia River gorge. Any remaining stone floors were left uneven; lifted briefly to install under-floor heating, air conditioning and plumbing, they were replaced stone by stone. One original detail that was altered: musty residual cave air, which Berg remedied with a fragrance that she engineered from the oils of wild myrtle, rosemary and thyme she found growing in abundance in the nearby gorge.

I ask Berg, who spent her childhood years in Germany, how she found her way to Matera. 'I discovered it as an art student in the 1980s and fell in love with the caves.' She spent afternoons depicting the ancient dwellings on canvas. 'There is a magic conjured by these abandoned places. They evoke the friends, families and lovers whose lives unfolded in them over centuries.' She found herself captivated by their reality – and potential. Then she read about Daniele Kihlgren, a young half-Swedish, half-Italian entrepreneur who transformed the abandoned medieval village of Santo Stefano di Sessanio, in the Abruzzo region, into a hotel that won international attention and rekindled the local economy. She contacted him about her dream of doing the same in the Sassi, and Kihlgren travelled to Matera to scout the site. Upon seeing the algae-covered caves, says Berg, he assumed the challenge. 'We envisioned a luxury hospitality that broke with the usual concept of very luxurious settings,' she adds. It took four years of daily struggle to renovate the caves into a hotel, with Berg, passionate about authenticity (she is currently travelling the world to work on similar restoration projects), insisting no materials alien to the former cave inhabitants be introduced. 'I tried to retain the gestalt and the sorrow I sensed when I found the grottoes. There is nothing of the hotelier here,' she observes.

Setting out from my suite to explore Matera, I pass a French family with three girls arranging a picnic on a table on a terrace fashioned from the tuff. Cheese, fruit, small cakes and a bottle of Aglianico del Vulture, one of Basilicata's most acclaimed wines, sit on the handwoven tablecloth salvaged from some long-ago bride's hope chest. The girls, delighted by this adventure in a land of grottoes, wave 'Salut!' as I walk by. 'Bon appétit,' I call back, but find myself wondering about the dreams in that chest – and what the bride would make of the luxe accommodation crafted from the modest dwelling.

I pause to look at the town and see no streets, only staircases that weave or bound from one level to the next. The higgledy-piggledy layout soon has me tramping up sloped paths and ancient stairs, passing lace-curtained windows and doors wafting out the scent of simmering tomato sauce. After reaching a few dead ends and having

SIMPLICITY RULES

The church-like suites in Matera's Le Grotte della Civita hotel are vast, with vaulted ceilings, windows looking out over the valley. To retain its medieval character, all modern technology is concealed







PASTORAL SCENES

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Breakfasts include organic fare baked by local artisans; Matera's MUSMA Museum of Contemporary Sculpture; one of the medieval villages that straddle the gentle hills of the Marche region; antique linens were repurposed as curtains; rooms in Santo Stefano di Sessanio are simply furnished in traditional style; Eneo Bellucci has farmed in Montemaggiore his entire life





to retrace my steps, I forgo these old ways for the road along the craggy ravine that faces my suite. Here a tang of wild herbs fills my head. I stop a kind-looking local signora to ask what the scent is. ‘*Fiori di campo* – wild flowers,’ she answers. ‘*Deve ritornare in primavera* – you must return in spring,’ she adds, explaining the ravine then blooms into a colourful riot of flora.

Matera is making a deep impression on me with its centuries of civilisation compressed into one small settlement. I pass various churches – here Romanesque, there baroque – as I ascend to the town’s summit, with its crowning *duomo*, or cathedral, a medieval landmark whose elegant bell tower dominates the skyline. Eager to know more about these and other landmarks, I find a local guide, Raffaele Stifano, who suggests a walking tour of Matera old and new. On his business card, under ‘authorised tour guide’, he has added ‘cinematography locations’, reminding me that Matera was a setting for director Pier Paolo Pasolini’s classic 1964 film, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*. Forty years later, much of the modern world first glimpsed this unusual town in another film: Mel Gibson’s 2004 *The Passion of the Christ*. Both films set scenes in some of the 150-plus churches hewn out of the rock here.

Sensing my curiosity about daily life in the Sassi, Stifano steers me to the Cave House of Vico Solitario, a reconstruction of a typical 20th-century cave dwelling complete with furniture, wall decorations, household implements (including a loom) and a life-size plastic mule in the chamber that traditionally housed the inhabitants’ animals. I note a grain chest similar to those Margareta Berg fashioned into tables, a soap dish akin to the one in my room and a faded mirror just like that in my bathroom alcove. ‘This is real,’ says Stifano. ‘This is exactly the way it was.’

Stifano was born in the Sassi and spent his first seven years here, until his family was allotted public housing in 1963. ‘It took the government two decades to build enough public housing for all the cave dwellers,’ he tells me. Were most Sassi dwellers glad to leave their cave homes, I ask. ‘They were more than happy!’ he assures me. ‘They wanted Formica.’

He returned to the empty, bricked-up caves in 1977 to live as a squatter with his hippie friends. Little did they imagine the area would be declared a World Heritage Site 16 years later – a recognition by the international community that prompted the local government to stimulate funding for restorations. Few takers stepped forward, however, because the caves could only be leased, not bought – which turned out to be a boon for squatters like Stifano, who had been trying to salvage the cave dwellings with scarce resources. Now the squatters were seen as an asset.

‘We were hooked up to the electricity grid and water system and given legal status as residents,’ he says. Slowly, other enterprises moved into the area, including upmarket restaurants – Baccanti, Le Bubbole – that offered lighter interpretations of rustic local specialties. The Sassi became chic: architects, artists, foreigners and filmmakers leased caves from the government to renovate as homes. ‘Gentrification took over,’ says Stifano, ‘and Matera found itself being reborn.’

I dine that evening on the terrace of Le Botteghe, a trattoria specialising in the regional *cucina povera*, or ‘poor cooking’.

Munching on toasted fava beans and sipping a glass of wine from the region, I watch a village festival ramp up in the street. Locals and visitors from surrounding towns are getting in line for free wine and servings of *crapiata*, a flavourful blend of beans, lentils, chickpeas and potatoes prepared after all the planting and harvesting is done. When, later, I stroll back to my room, the old town of Matera sits incandescent in the night, the rock-hewn churches transformed by theatrically choreographed lighting.

To delve further into the *albergo diffuso* concept, I reserve a room at Due Campanili and hop on a northbound train. Matera remains a high-profile example, but 'a model for the *albergo diffuso* concept was Due Campanili Relais, in the Marche region in central Italy,' Dall'Ara, who founded the group, had told me. The Marche [MAR-keh], lying between Umbria and the Adriatic Sea, has it all – art, architecture, vineyards, mountains, beach resorts, culinary and musical traditions – and yet is, so far, relatively undiscovered by tourists. Tour buses are rare, except perhaps in the walled, Renaissance-era city of Urbino, a World Heritage Site known for its art-filled – Raphael, Titian – Palazzo Ducale. Transformation – careful, locally driven transformation – distinguishes the 53 properties that belong to the Alberghi Diffusi Association.

'There is a magic conjured by these abandoned places. They evoke the friends, families and lovers whose lives unfolded in them over centuries'

A car from the Due Campanili hotel picks me up at the train station in the little town of Fano and we thread inland through vineyards and along hills blanketed in varied shades of green to the hamlet of Montemaggiore al Metauro. This sleepy cluster of stone homes dating to before the 16th century, when it was a noted regional producer of wool, perches atop a small hill overlooking the meadow-quilted Metauro River valley.

As the Industrial Revolution began to make over Europe, Montemaggiore al Metauro – like so many hill towns in rural Italy – was passed by. Residents trickled away for better opportunities, a process hastened by World War II. By the 1950s, the walled hamlet – with its two bell towers, or *campanili*, for which the hotel is named – was essentially abandoned.

Enter, in the 1980s, Irene Mangiarotti and her architect brother Gianfranco, whose specialty is reimagining old hotels (Rome's Hotel Art, Sicily's Grand Hotel Monte Tauro). Presented, by a friend, with 35 buildings to play with, they rolled up their sleeves and repropounded the lot as a 'horizontal' hotel. Furnishings would be period pieces from the mid-1800s to the 1940s, the final decade the town was inhabited. 'Much of it we found in the area,' Gianfranco, mid-forties and wearing dark-rimmed glasses, tells me of their hunt for original pieces. 'The problem was finding enough for so many accommodations. We searched antiques fairs and markets until we found authentic items.' I'm shown to my two-bedroom apartment, which I'm happy to see

comes with expansive views of the Metauro Valley. A quick rest and back out I go to become acquainted with what today will be my village. I wander the 15 or so cobblestone lanes, only five of which are named. Birdsong and the peal of church bells fill the air. Two women playing cards at a stone table nod cordially as I pass. Other neighbours have parked kitchen chairs outside their doors to enjoy, for another day, the countryside views. As I approach, they wish me a *buon giorno*.

'A good day comes naturally here, in your relaxing village,' I answer in Italian, and catch their proud smiles. Each lane I follow eventually brings me to a view of the valley. It doesn't take me long to fall in love.

The next morning, wanting to see more of the hotel, I join a hotel staffer on his rounds of the eight refurbished buildings – including a spa – that make up the hotel. Guest units range from single rooms to an apartment that sleeps six and includes a garden. The faithful-in-every-detail period decor conveys a feeling of living in a less complicated time and place.

This sense of ease has been luring descendants of villagers who forsook Montemaggiore al Metauro; they're returning here for summer vacations or even to retire. 'We are really seeing an increase in people fleeing the city for a more liveable place,' Giancarlo Bruschini, who plans cultural activities in the area, says as we sip prosecco and sample *formaggio di fossa* – a local cheese that ages for a

year in earthen pits, where it takes on the flavours of wood, moss and truffles – at the hotel's restaurant. A fairly new eatery that specialises in traditional dishes, the restaurant has been drawing patrons, as have stargazing parties, theatre workshops and other activities. Additional attractions include the surrounding Metauro Valley and its network of museums that showcase disappearing regional crafts and customs. I make my way to the pottery museum and soon find myself throwing a pot on the wheel; at a weaving museum I slide a shuttle to-and-fro on an old-fashioned loom; I watch local masons demonstrate their craft at the stonemasonry museum; and I finger a variety of ropes and handmade bricks in a small museum that is dedicated to, well, making ropes and bricks.

Then I recollect a comment Dall'Ara had made. 'I think of an *albergo diffuso* as a novel that tells the story of a culture. Guests are brought into the story temporarily so they can better understand the way of life.' I think back to my tastefully tricked-out cave in Matera, then to my traditional village lodging here in the Marche countryside and understand just what he means. On my final night at Due Campanili, settling into my antique Marchigiana bed, I meditate on something DH Lawrence once wrote: 'For us to ... penetrate into Italy is like a most fascinating act of self-discovery – back, back down the old ways of time. Strange and wonderful chords awake in us, and vibrate again after many hundreds of years of complete forgetfulness.'

I am there, down the old ways of time, *tranquilla*.

GETTING THERE Lufthansa flies from Joburg to Bari, Italy, via Frankfurt and Bologna (connecting flights with Alitalia CityLiner) and return with Air Dolomiti via Munich, R9 134; www.kayak.com. In summer, take Pugliairbus, a free bus service, from Bari Airport to Matera: check timetables on <http://pugliairbus.aeroportidipuglia.it/>. Matera is also served by a private rail line called Ferrovie Appulo-Lucane; www.fal-srl.it. Take the train to Bari on Trenitalia (www.trenitalia.com) and then take the private line to Matera (an inexpensive and scenic 90-minute trip). For flexibility, hire a car (www.eurocar.com), but check on parking facilities first.

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ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND

THERE'S FAR MORE TO VICTORIA FALLS THAN THUNDERING WATER. ADRENALINE JUNKIES CAN EYEBALL GIANT CROCS, LEAP HEAD-FIRST OFF A GORGE AND PADDLE THROUGH PODS OF HIPPOS

WORDS AARON GEKOSKI AND GEMMA CATLIN

VICTORIA FALLS, referred to locally as Mosi-oa-Tunya, or the 'Smoke that Thunders', has long been one of Africa's most popular tourist attractions. It's a spectacle of unfathomable proportions: every second, 536 million cubic litres of water tumble into the Zambezi River below, making it the world's largest sheet of falling water. It would be easy to pick up a chair, sit back and simply soak up such a sight. And for an hour or two we did just that; we sighed a little, we 'ahhed' a lot. What must it have been like for explorer David Livingstone to stumble upon the Falls in 1855? Soon, however, it was time for us to move on to some high-octane activities. This region is about far more than just a giant waterfall. For a start, it's home to some of the most enjoyable, wild and downright terrifying adventure pursuits on Earth. We found ourselves with a mere seven days to sample seven of its best.

HIGH WIRE

As I reach the edge of the platform, set above a hairpin bend, I break rule number one and look down. I don't so much jump as crumble over it. Seventy metres of unassisted free-fall follow; my feet search for an imaginary floor. And then the cord tightens and the gorge cradles me in her giant arms. Gemma, ever the thrill-seeker, throws herself off backwards. She plunges, screaming, headfirst towards the river below. The Gorge Swing is not for the faint-hearted. Overlooking Zambezi's Batoka Gorge, aka The Big Eddy, the other Wild Horizons High Wire activities are a breeze by comparison. Gemma and I strap ourselves together on the zip line and race at 100km/h towards the rapids. Once our hearts' recover, we take a leisurely soar over to Zambia on the Flying Fox cable slide. En route, we even have a moment to take in the Batoka Gorge in all its glory.

Price R1 000 for all three; www.wildhorizons.co.za – *Aaron*

WHITE-WATER RAFTING

After an exhilarating day of whizzing above the Zambezi, it's time to conquer her turbulent waters. Every year thousands of people visit this 21-rapid challenge, Africa's most popular rafting spot. Aaron and I stumble down the steep gorge's edge towards the river, ludicrously unprepared in our slops. After the 30-minute descent, we haul ourselves aboard the raft, tighten our top-of-the-range lifejackets and secure our helmets. It's time to get wet. The next six hours hurtle by in a blur of instructions and frantic paddling. 'Hard left, hard left! Now get down!' bellows our river guide as we head straight for a level-four rapid. Moments later the mischievous river god Nyaminyami decides it's time for a swim. Flipping over is half the fun – and a great way to cool down before the steep hike back up the gorge.

Price R1 000, including lunch; www.wildhorizons.co.za – *Gemma*

CROC CAGE DIVING

As fanatical divers, we are always keen to experience new underwater adventures. And what could be more thrilling than coming nose-to-nose with a mighty Nile crocodile? An uncertain Gem and I edge into the cage. After a few checks to ensure the door's closed properly, we fix our masks and breathe slowly through the centrally fixed regulators. The enclosure stutters into the murky water below. Gem, despite my assurances, clings nervily to my arm. Once our eyes adjust to the

crocs' lair, we dangle shreds of raw flesh through the bars to lure them close. Within moments, we are just inches from the ancient reptiles. One clambers above our heads, while another looms towards the reassuringly thick window, pauses and sniffs at Gem – fast food? We emerge 25 minutes later, unscathed and sporting croc-sized grins.

Price R420; www.predatordiving.com – *Aaron*

CANOEING

At last we are in for a calmer day: a relaxing paddle down a gentle stretch of the Zambezi with my loved one. A canoe built for two – what could be more romantic? We take a meandering game drive to the launch point, where we pause for coffee. Before the peaceful paddle to the Falls, we receive a crash course in steering and a list of potential dangers. I notice a croc surveying us from the bank. 'Forget crocs,' we're told. 'It's hippos you need to watch out for.' We hop into our lightweight boat, but it's not long before some passing birds divert Aaron's attention and we find ourselves first spinning in circles and later heading straight for a pod of angry hippos. We survive – just – and bicker our way downstream. Finally, distracted by the grazing giraffe, we make up and (in unison) cruise back to the Falls.

Price R600, including breakfast; www.wildhorizons.co.za – *Gemma*

ELEPHANT-BACK SAFARI

A leisurely meander on a pachyderm is a great way to see the valley of the Masuwe River and get close to the wildlife. Our obedient hosts even respond to 45 commands – in three languages. The elephants, all orphans, appear well treated and are rewarded for their efforts with food. As we stroll through the thick vegetation, our guides treat us to some well-rehearsed nelly facts. The aptly named Handsome tells us that they: often live to over 70 years of age; have about 100 000 muscles in their trunks; and can top the scales at over 6 000 kilograms. This may just be the most impressive way to explore the Zim bush.

Price R1 000; www.adventurezonevicfalls.com – *Aaron*



WALKING WITH LIONS

I am not looking forward to this activity one bit. Not only is our alarm again set for 5.30am, but I also anticipate a shameless lion breeder full of false claims. African lion populations have declined by an estimated 80 to 90% in the last 50 years. Sadly, a number of 'conservationists' are cashing in on their demise. I am expecting Lion Encounter to be one of them. Fortunately, I am wrong. The programme supports ALERT's four-step breeding initiative that aims to reintroduce lions into the wild. Before the big cats welcome us, we learn about the current lion crisis: their loss of habitat, poaching threats and increasing conflicts with man. Guests beam during the rare opportunity to interact and walk with the playful cubs. The initiative appears to benefit lion conservation and at last a burgeoning problem is being addressed.

Price R1 000; www.adventurezonevicfalls.com – *Gemma*

HELICOPTER RIDE OVER THE FALLS (FLIGHT OF ANGELS)

When David Livingstone first documented the Falls, he remarked on 'a sight so wonderful that angels must have gazed down on it in flight'. If only the explorer could have witnessed the aerial views from our tiny chopper. A 13-minute helicopter ride is probably the most impressive way to view Mosi-oa-Tunya, as well as the easiest on the legs. I organise the trip as a surprise for Gem's birthday: it's almost too perfect. The Falls spraypaint a giant rainbow that frames the scene beneath us. Clusters of tourists morph into brightly coloured specks as we are treated to views extending far beyond the waterfall: past the Zambezi and deep into Zambia and Zimbabwe. We end our flight reflecting on Zimbabwe's troubled past and, with any luck, its bright future. Let's hope people start returning to this magical country.

Price R1 000; www.shearwatervictoriafalls.com – *Aaron*

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

WHERE TO EAT AND STAY Gorges Lodge is incredibly special. Teetering 200 metres above the Zambezi River, this ecolodge ploughs resources into local communities. From R575; www.imvelosafarilodges.com

Even if you don't stay at the Victoria Falls Hotel, the colonial atmosphere and some of the region's best food make it an essential visit.

From R1 040; www.africansunhotels.com

Adventure Lodge is one of the best budget options in Vic Falls. The rooms are cosy, but the spacious communal area and tasty grub more than compensate. From R325; www.adventurezonevicfalls.com

WHEN TO GO Summer time (November to April) is the wet season, when temperatures are hot and the rainfall is heavy. May to August can be pretty chilly in the morning, but there are blue skies and warm afternoons. September to October is dry and swelteringly hot.

GETTING THERE Fly from Joburg to Victoria Falls with British Airways, from R4 432 return, or SAA, from R4 966 return. Via Livingstone Fly to nearby Livingstone, Zambia, with BA, from R3 166 return, or SAA, from R3 800 return; www.travelstart.co.za. The 20-minute road transfer to Vic Falls is about R200; www.victoriafalls-guide.net.



FREE AS A BIRD
THIS PAGE Soar over the
Zambezi Gorge on the
Flying Fox cable slide
OPPOSITE Crocodile cage
diving is an adrenaline
rush second to none





Wild Heart

There's something intrinsically romantic about a chalet beside a beach with a perfect lagoon. Add the wild ocean pounding the shore at the southern tip of Africa and you tick all the boxes

Agulhas National Park has chosen the most alluring spot for its new rest camp, right beside a secluded marine lagoon. Eight timber-and-thatch chalets overlook a sweeping bay where seagulls pick the white beach clean of morsels washed in by the last tide. Prominent on a headland to the east is Lagoon House – it'd be hard to find a bed any closer to the ocean.

This treacherous coast is a great place to play castaway as countless ships have been wrecked on its rocks. Walk the circular 5,5km Rasperpunt Trail and see the remains of the Meisho Maru wreck. Birding in the 21 000-hectare reserve in the Overberg south of Caledon is superb as the extensive wetlands of Voëlvlei and Soetensdalsvlei on the Agulhas Plain are magnets for a host of interesting birds.

The self-catering chalets are built on platforms to preserve the rare lowland fynbos. Four provide cosy nests for couples and the rest are two-bedroom family units. All are equipped to Sanparks' highest standards of comfort, from quality cotton bed linen to stainless-steel kitchen cookware.

As waves roll up the beach and a lone African black oystercatcher is joined by its mate, it's time for a sundowner and your own courtship ritual as the fiery ball of our nearest star sinks into the ocean, filling the view from your deck.

– Marion Whitehead

NEED TO KNOW

Costs Daily park conservation fees for South African residents are R22 for adults and R11 for children; if you have a valid Wild Card you pay no conservation fees. Timber chalets are R840 a night for two and R1 560 for four. Lagoon House is R2 365 a night for six people. (Rates valid until the end of October 2012.)

Contact Sanparks central reservations 012 428 9111, reservations@sanparks.org; www.sanparks.org



PHOTOGRAPH MARION WHITEHEAD



POOL PARTY

Ba'Aka women and children
frolic in the Sangha River

A DAY WITH THE PYGMIES

In Africa's Congo Basin, I learn how to leave behind a small footprint

WORDS BOYD MATSON

TEN PYGMIES CARRYING HUNTING NETS climb into the back of a Land Cruiser... This sounds like the opening line of a joke. It's not. It's how my afternoon starts on this day in the Congo Basin in the Central African Republic. We – a guide, driver, translator, the Pygmies and I – are putting some distance between us and the nearest village. Soon we'll stop to bushwhack our way deeper into the forest to hunt for duiker. If the Pygmies want meat in their diet, they have to catch it. These Pygmies, or Ba'Aka, as they call themselves, are about as close to true hunter-gatherers as a tribe can be with the 21st century pressing in on all sides.

The Ba'Aka do have their own municipal swimming pool cum Laundromat. No signs, lifeguards or washing machines identify the spot as a place of business, so the uninitiated might see only a wide bend in a small tributary that drains into the nearby Sangha River. But earlier this morning, passing by the river on my way to take pictures of forest elephants and western lowland gorillas, I spot some women in the water washing their clothes, their kids and themselves. It is a scenic and noisy tableau filled with the kind of laughter, clapping, yelling and splashing you'd expect to hear at any pool on a hot summer day.

That afternoon, back in the Land Cruiser, the hunters are getting themselves fired up for the duiker hunt. They're clapping and doing a call-and-response type of chant. Louis Sarno, an American riding with us who has been living with the Pygmies for more than 25 years, explains: 'It's a hunting song that calls out to the forest spirits asking for success, although the song is more about the musical rhythm than the actual words.'

When we finally stop and scramble out of the vehicle, we pause to pose for some pictures. I take one standing with a couple of the women, a shot I call 'Me and My Half Sisters'. Then we snap a few frames of the entire hunting party. I joke that the photos will be a digital reference we can check at the end of the day to make sure all who go into the jungle got out alive. The Ba'Aka don't laugh, because the premise doesn't make sense to them. They can't imagine how anyone could possibly get lost here, even though this dense forest seems unmarked by trails or signposts, and we're carrying no maps and no GPS (which would show nothing besides a big green uncharted blob, anyway).

What to me is a confusing maze of trees and vines is the Ba'Aka's own backyard and, in effect, their shopping mall. Here they find roots, seeds and insects to eat; branches to frame their small, dome-shaped

huts; leaves to make and repair the walls and roofs of their homes; and vines with which to fashion their hunting nets.

Perhaps most surprising of the available forest products is the 'bottle' of jungle drinking water I'm invited to sample. In keeping with the environmentally sustainable traditions of the Ba'Aka, the container is completely biodegradable. Actually, it's a 60-centimetre-long section of vine about five centimetres in diameter. I tip it over my open mouth and out pours clean natural drinking water. Given their lifestyle, the Ba'Aka must leave one of the smallest carbon footprints of any people on the planet – not to mention one of the smallest actual footprints.

The Ba'Aka's diminutive stature proves an advantage in the twisting jungles of the Congo River Basin. The Ba'Aka around me are staying upright and practically sprinting while I'm crouched as low as possible and falling further and further behind. It isn't easy manoeuvring my 1,98-metre frame under the low-hanging branches and between the narrow openings in this tightly woven tapestry of tropical vegetation. I'm staying as close as I can to the hunting party. Finally they assign a guy with a machete to lead me; he hacks openings for me in the undergrowth. As we move through the forest, the women continually reset their four nets. They stretch them through the trees to form an almost complete circle. The men then run around beating the bushes and yelling, trying to drive the duiker into the nets. We do this again and again with no success – and no sign of the small antelope having even been in the area recently.

I find a shotgun shell on the forest floor. Sarno says: 'Poachers. They're wiping out the antelope. The Ba'Aka are having to go deeper into the forest for food.' He adds: 'Net hunting is not very efficient, which makes it highly sustainable. But it only works when there are lots of antelope.'

I wonder how much longer the Ba'Aka can hold on to their hunter-gatherer way of life. Already they have begun farming yams and manioc. They trade with a Bantu village to get machine-made products. It's unfair for us in the developed world to ask those in the developing world to forgo changes that would make their lives easier. The good news for us is that there is time to see this place where lives are lived closer to the past than to the present. There is time to learn that perhaps we too need to change to survive in the 21st century. The Ba'Aka can show us how to live with a bit less, leaving behind a smaller footprint.

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